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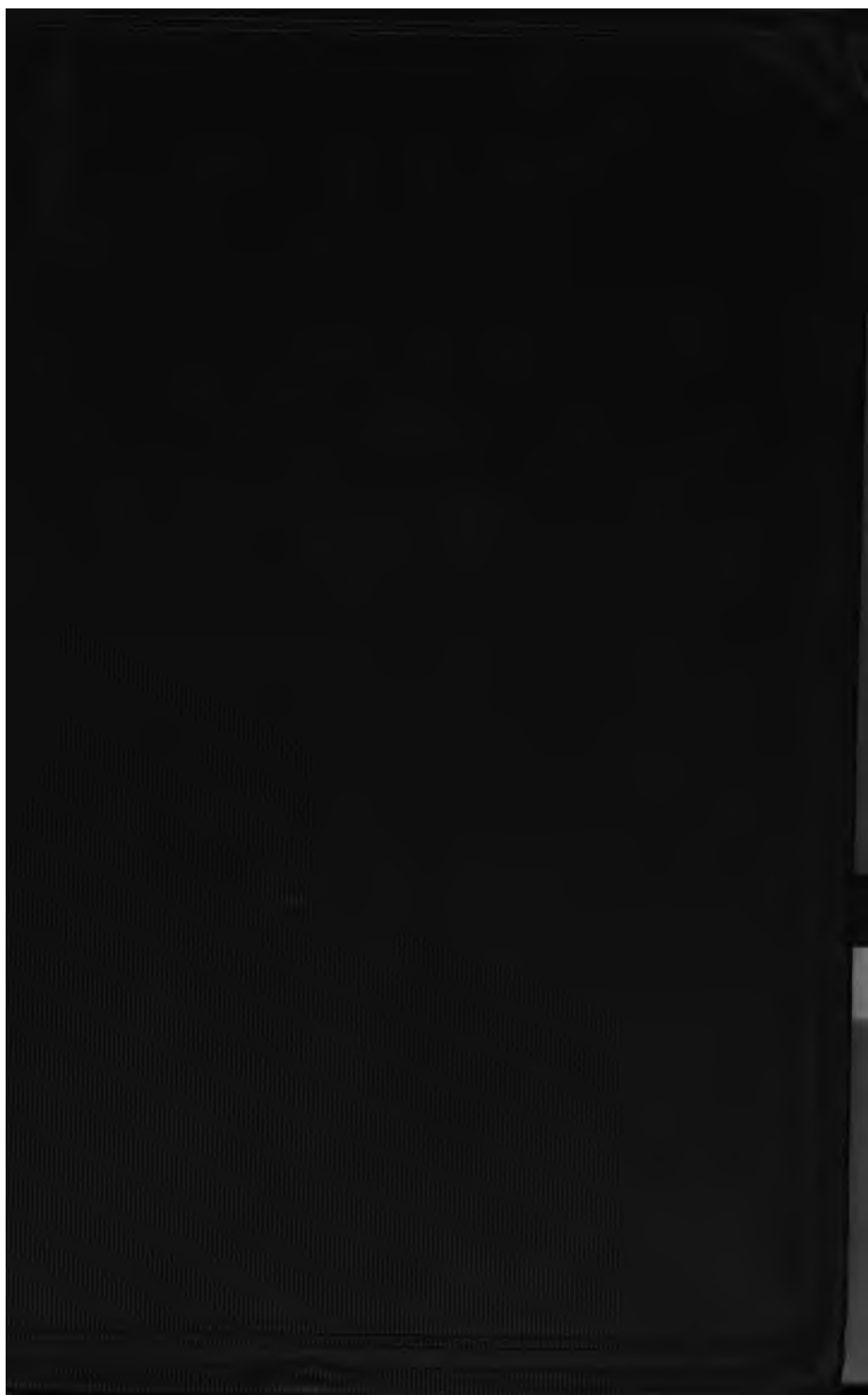
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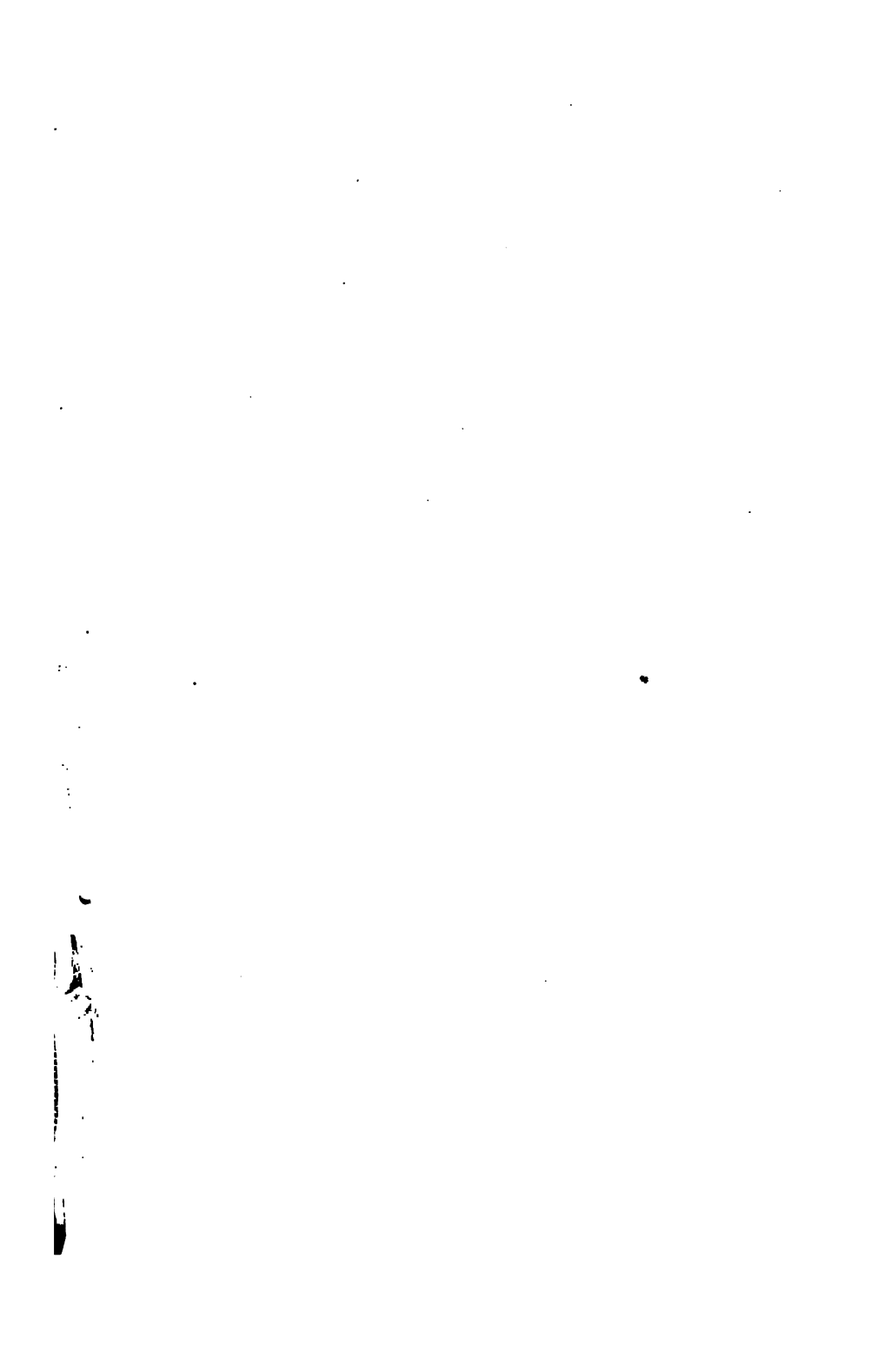


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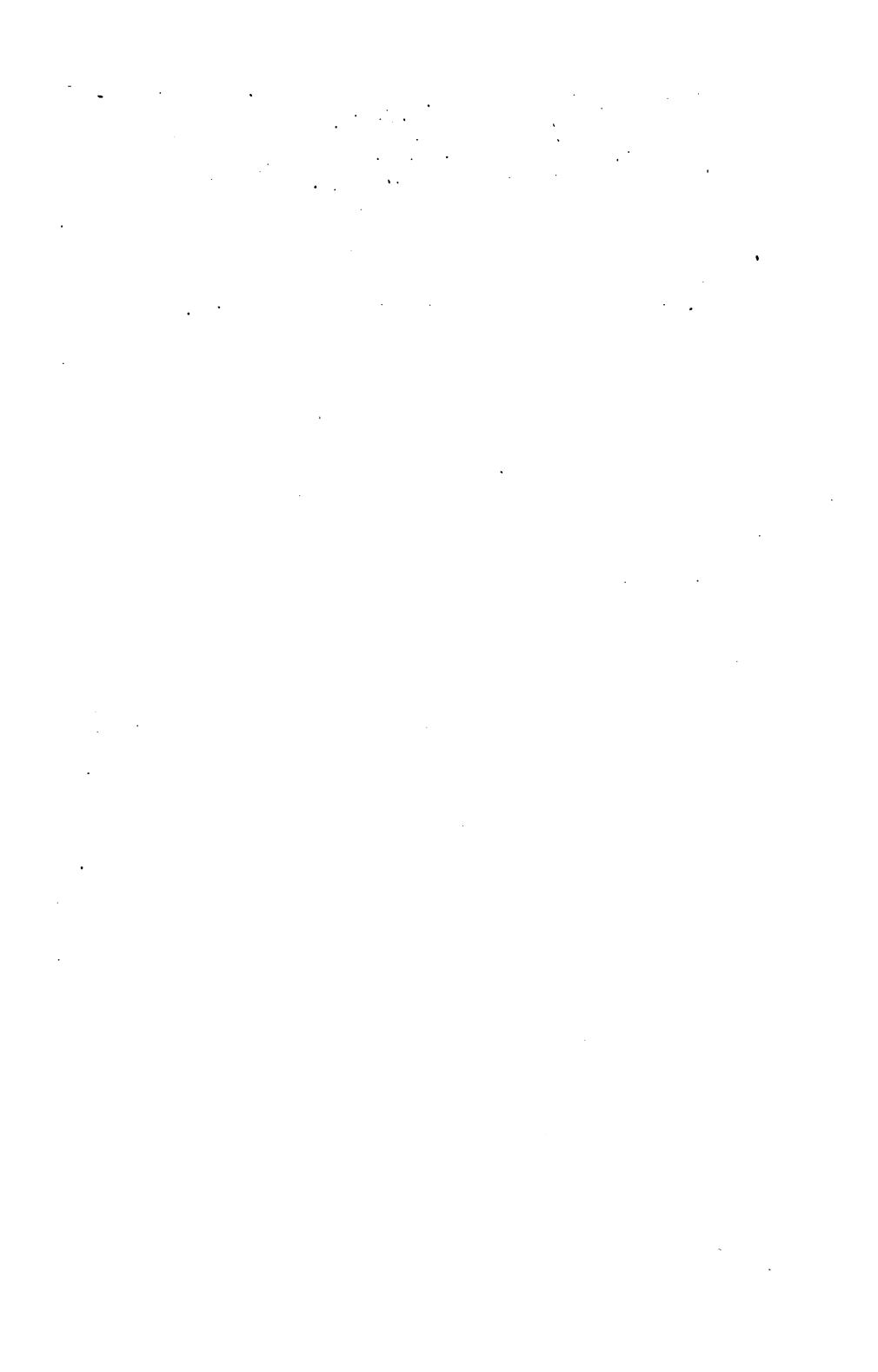
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# THE LIFE AND THE POETRY OF CHARLES COTTON

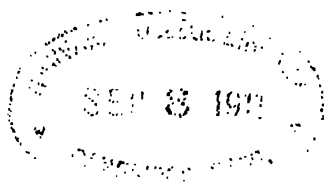
BY  
CHARLES JACOB SEMBOWER  
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, INDIANA UNIVERSITY



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# THE LIFE AND THE POETRY OF CHARLES COTTON

## INTRODUCTION

To the general reader, the name of Charles Cotton means hardly anything at all; and indeed to scholars, who are not specialists within the period in which his life fell, it is little more than a name. Now and then, to be sure, it is remembered as the name of Walton's associate "Angler," perhaps also as that of the translator of Montaigne, or, much less favorably, as that of the author of a burlesque poem called the "Virgil Travesty."

Nevertheless, Cotton has not been without appreciators who rank him as one of the most delightful minor poets of the seventeenth century. Wordsworth knew him well, and in "A Letter to a friend of Robert Burns," pays a tribute to him as a "highly-gifted man" who not only in certain unfortunate circumstances of his life, but in "versatility of genius" bore "no unobvious resemblance to the Scottish bard." Coleridge found in the volume of "Poems on Several Occasions" (1689) by Cotton, "not a few poems replete with every excellence of thought,

image and passion which we expect or desire in the poetry of the milder Muse." Charles Lamb quotes and praises the poet more than once,—in this case, as so often elsewhere, hitting upon the distinctive quality in his man. "How say you, reader"—he exclaims after quoting Cotton's "New Year,"—"do not these verses smack of the rough magnanimity of the old English vein? Do they not fortify like a cordial; enlarging the heart, and productive of sweet blood and generous spirits in the concoction? Where be those puling fears of death just now expressed or affected? Passed like a cloud—absorbed in the purging sunlight of clear poetry—clean washed away by a wave of genuine Helicon—." Archbishop Trench, more careful perhaps to guard against the charge of over-praise, found in Cotton's poems "a merit which," he says, "certainly strikes me more than any singular wealth of fancy which I can find in them; and which to Wordsworth also must have constituted their chief attraction; namely, the admirable English in which they are written. They are sometimes prosaic, sometimes blemished by more serious moral faults; but for homely vigor and purity of language, for the total absence of any attempt to conceal the deficiency of strong and high imagination by a false poetic diction—purple rags torn from other men's garments and sewn upon his own—he may take his place among the foremost masters of the tongue." In America it was Lowell who found Cotton to be "an excellent poet, and a thorough master of succulently idiomatic English, which he treated with a

country-gentlemanlike familiarity, as his master, Montaigne, had treated French." And again in defense of the poet, Lowell says, "If he wrote the 'Virgil Travesty,' he also wrote verses which the difficult Wordsworth could praise, and a poem of gravely noble mood addressed to Walton on his Lives, in which he shows a knowledge of what goodness is that no bad man could have acquired. Let one line of it at least shine in my page, not as a sample but for its own dear sake:—

'For in a virtuous act all good men share.' "

So much, in brief, as to the rare quality of language, mind and heart that is to be found in Cotton's serious verse. Why, if all this is so, has he been, as a poet, so long neglected?

Two or three reasons at once occur to the student of the poetry of the period. In the first place, very little of his best work was published in his lifetime. It circulated to some extent amongst his friends, who were not insensible to its high merit; but it was not printed till 1689. Then it came too late. Cotton himself, though driven to it by necessity, had helped to establish a taste for licentious verse and for burlesque. In 1689, there was little appreciation remaining for the verse of Cotton's youth and early manhood. Perhaps even if it had been published at the time of its production, it would still have been out of key with the public taste. The "sweet amenity" of his master, Isaac Walton, had met with little response as pure literature. Until well into the eighteenth century, the "Angler" was



thought of as merely a pleasant manual for the craft. "The magnanimity of the old English vein" would probably have been as easily overlooked. At all events the reputation that Cotton gained after 1660 as a translator and as a pleasant burlesquer and compiler was naturally adverse to a quick response to the work of his serious muse. This reputation as a clever man-of-letters kept fresh well into the next century, but there is little or no record that his poetry was known at all. It had to wait for its hearing until the beginning of the following century, when a genuine love of nature and of thoroughly poetical conception sought out and discovered poetry wherever it lay hid.

As a poet, however, he would naturally have suffered much from the changing attitude of his time toward poetry. Professor Schelling, in the introduction to his "Seventeenth Century Lyrics," has pointed out that "Whilst the larger number of poets between 1640 and 1670, according to temperament or circumstances, held either to the old manner, as did Milton and Marvell, or went over wholly to the new, as did Waller and Denham, a few were caught, so to speak, between the conflicting waves of the two movements, and are of unusual historical interest on this account." Of those who, without being reactionary, were loyal to the spirit that was passing, Charles Cotton was by no means the least.

The poet was descended from an ancient and honorable family. His great-grandfather was Sir Richard Cotton, Comptroller of the Household and Privy

Councilor to Edward the Sixth. His grandfather was Sir George Cotton of Warblenton in the county of Sussex and of Bedhampton in the county of Southampton. Sir George married Cassandra, one of the co-heiresses of Henry Mackwilliams of Stanburne-hall in the county of Essex, "sometymes of the honorable band of Pensioners to the late Queene of ffamous memorye, Queene Elizabeth." Sir George's son, Charles Cotton, Esquire, became the poet's father.

Charles Cotton, the elder, has left no record of himself in letters, but his fame is plentifully preserved in the writings of his friends and admirers. Herrick and Lovelace are among those who inscribed poems to him. Of the poets, Herrick gives the most detailed appreciation of the man.

"For brave comportment, wit without offence,  
Words fully flowing, yet of influence:  
Thou art that man of men, the man alone,

Who with thine own eyes read'st what we do write,  
And giv'st our numbers euphony and weight;  
Tell'st when a verse springs high, how understood  
To be, or not, born of the royal blood.

For which, my Charles, it is my pride to be  
Not as much known, as to be lov'd of thee."

Thus, though he was not himself a poet, he was a critic of rare ability and a man beloved by those whose work he criticised. Lovelace, in dedicating to him the poem called "The Grasshopper," made affectionate reference to his capacity for good-fel-

lowship, a characteristic which we shall find also to be not the least distinctive among those of his son:—

“Thou best of men and friends! we will create  
 A genuine summer in each other's breast;  
 And spite of this cold Time and frozen Fate,  
 Thaw us a warme seate to our rest.”

Another contemporary poet, Henry Glapthorne, praised him with convincing discrimination; his friend, Alexander Brome, dedicated an edition of Fletcher's “Monsieur Thomas” to him; and his relative and neighbor, Sir Aston Cokaine, affectionately took him to task in a poetical epistle for his part in an edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, which seemed to Sir Aston over-generous to the Frenchman, Beaumont, at the expense of the Englishman, Fletcher. In 1652, Davenant dedicated the Seventh Canto of the Third Book of “Gondibert” to him; in stanzas iv and v, we find this friendly prophecy:

“And Charles, in that more civil Century,  
 When this shall wholly fill the voice of Fame,  
 The busy Antiquaries then will try  
 To find amongst their Monarch's coin, thy Name.

Much they will bless thy Virtue, by whose fire  
 I'll keep my laurel warm, which else would fade,  
 And, thus inclos'd, think me of Nature's Quire,  
 Which still sing sweetest in the shade.”

The list of the friends of the elder Cotton is, indeed, an imposing one; it includes, besides those mentioned, such famous names as those of Ben Jonson,

Donne, Selden, May, Carew, Walton, Chief Justice Vaughn and Lord Clarendon. The latter's portrait of him—few can sketch more deftly than Clarendon—is interesting not only on its own account, but also for the striking resemblance that it leaves us to find between the father and the son:—

“Charles Cotton,” says Lord Clarendon, “was a gentleman born to a competent fortune, and so qualified in his person and education, that for many years he continued the greatest ornament of the town, in the esteem of those who had been best bred. His natural parts were very great, his wit flowing in all the parts of conversation; the superstructure of learning not raised to a considerable height; but having passed some years in Cambridge, and then in France, and conversing always with learned men, his expressions were proper and significant, and gave great lustre to his discourse upon any argument; so that he was thought by those who were not intimate with him, to have been much better acquainted with books than he was. He had all those qualities which in youth raise men to the reputation of being fine gentlemen; such a sweetness and gentleness of nature, and such a civility and delightfulness in conversation, that no man in the court, or out of it, appeared a more accomplished person; all these extraordinary qualifications being supported by as extraordinary a clearness of courage and fearlessness of spirit.”

It was an extraordinary heritage. Yet the younger Cotton was endowed with most of these traits, the finer and deeper ones no less than some of

those that had more dash and color. There remains to be mentioned only one other faculty which the father may have bequeathed to his son—the gift of expression. We have the testimony of no less a man than Isaac Walton to the elder Cotton's possession of this gift. Walton, speaking of the ancestral estate, Beresford, says, "The pleasantness of the river, mountains, and meadows about it, cannot be described, unless Sir Philip Sidney or Mr. Cotton's father were again alive to do it." This power of description was one of the most eminent possessed by the son.

The poet's mother was Olive Stanhope, the daughter and heiress of Sir John Stanhope and his wife, Olivia Beresford. Her father was half-brother to the first Earl of Chesterfield; her mother was a descendant of the "brave Beresfords," a family that had been prominent for centuries in the county of Derby. The ancient seat of the Beresfords, Fenny Bentley, was only a short walk to the northeast of Beresford Hall, the poet's birthplace. The Beresfords, ancient and modern, are known as men of fighting blood. One of them, Thomas—or "Tom"—was a hero of Agincourt, and left a story attached to his name which is of credit to the family. On the eve of his marriage, according to this story, the blast of a trumpet announced the approach of a messenger of King Henry the Fifth with a proclamation to his loyal subjects that he had been insulted by the French king, and that all unmarried men were to hasten to his standard. The Beresfords were loyal, Thomas was as yet unmarried; he must choose be-

tween his bride and his king. At the urgency of his betrothed as well as by his own desire, he followed the King into France. At Agincourt, he had the valor and good-fortune to save King Henry's life. He was rewarded later at his marriage by the special congratulations and favor of royalty. Such stories, if simple, make a tradition to which the least of kin does not listen with indifference, and serve as a more or less potent standard of conduct for a loyal line of soldiers and gentlemen. The Beresford name has come down through a list of rather remarkable men. Humphrey Beresford, one of the sixteen sons of Thomas of Agincourt, was the ancestor in direct line of the illustrious Irish Beresfords, Earls of Tyrone, Marquises of Waterford.

Olivia Beresford, great-grandmother of the poet, had been the sole heiress of her father Edward Beresford, and had come into possession of the family estates. These had descended to her daughter Olive (Beresford) Stanhope, and in due course they passed to her daughter, Olive (Stanhope) Cotton, mother of the poet, Charles.

The story of the love affair and run-away marriage of the poet's father and mother is one of much interest, as shown in the detailed account of it found by Mr. John Sleight in 1868, among some old family deeds and papers at Bentley Hall. The mutual passion of the young lovers, their hopes and fears, the plot and the carrying-out of it, have suffered surprisingly little in the hands of some old attorney:

“The ‘Severall answeare of Charles Cotton, Es-

quire, to the bill of Complaynt of Sir John Stanhope, Knight, Complaynannt.'

"This defendannt sayeth that it is true that understanding of the virtuous disposition of the Complaynannt's daughter, and receavinge satisfaction of the good report hee had heard, by the sight of her person, he did by all possible means addresse himself to intimate unto her his desires, and having the opportunity to meet with her att the house of one of her Aunts, hee, this defendannt did, in shorte time, discover her affection towards this defendannt, and there upon he was emboldened to proceede to move her in the way of marriadge. And there were some messages interchanged betwixt them, whereby she signified her readiness to answere this defendannt's desires therein, and the difficulty to obteyne her but by carrying her away. And did herselfe appointe to come to this defendannt, If he could come for her; where upon hee prepared a coache, and in the eveninge of the day, in the Bill mentioned, hee came in a Coache neere unto Salisbury Courte, where the Complaynannt dwelleth. And this defendannt's now wyfe came of her owne accorde to this defendannt, and went away with the defendannt and the same night this defendannt confesseth that they were marryed together; in doinge whereof if this defendannt's passion and fervency of affection have transported him beyond the bounds of wisdome, dutye, and good discretion, this defendannt doth most humbly crave the pardon and favorable construction of this most Hon<sup>ble</sup> Courte and of the Complaynannt concerninge the same."

Sir John Stanhope, in his bill of complaint, had imputed mercenary motives to the young lover, in carrying off the young woman, who was under the legal age of sixteen years. To make this charge probable, he alleged that the young husband was without means for her support. To this the defendant answered that "he had an estate in Landes of Inheritance and Rents left unto him of the yearly value of £600 per annum, or thereabouts, which he yet hath—besides a personall estate to the value of one thousand marks, or thereabouts. And," goes on this excellent attorney, "if the same be not aequivalent, or proportionable to the Complaynannt's daughter's estate; This Defendannt doubteth not but to supply any wants thereof by his affectionate love to his wyfe, and respectfull observation of such a ffather. And this defendannt further saith that he did not know that said Olive was under the age of sixteene yeares, but was credibly informed that she was of age of above sixteene years, nor knoweth what Inheritance was descendable upon the Complaynannt's Daughter (now this defendannt's wife) att the tyme that he sought to obteyne her for his wyfe; his affections beinge more fixed upon her person, and the Alliance of soe noble a ffamilye, than upon her estate."

The decision of the court is not included among these family documents; but that it favored the young lovers is shown by the record of a subsequent court decision, dated Whitehall, 13 January, 1629. This deals with a petition to the King by one John Darbyshire and Anne, his wife; "to escape from a



mercenary father-in-law, the petitioners intermarried, and unknowingly incurred the penalty against women marrying under the age of 16 without their parents' consent." In this case, the Attorney General reported "that the parties, if prosecuted might be punished and fined, but that there have been precedents of pardons in like cases, *ex. gr.* that of Mr. Cotton, for marrying the daughter of Sir John Stanhope, who was heir to her mother of a fair estate."

The only issue of this marriage was Charles Cotton, the poet. He was born, the 28th of April, 1630, at Beresford Hall, which, to judge by the old prints, was a typically comfortable and homelike English country seat. We have fortunately a few details from Part II. of the "Angler" and from some of Cotton's poems which not only confirm the impression of the prints, but give to them also something of the tinge of life. Piscator (Cotton) says to Viator:<sup>1</sup> "Walk but into the parlour, you will find one book or other in the window to entertain you the while." A sunlit cheerful parlor no doubt it was with a row of books on the broad sill of its latticed window, and beside it a comfortable chair for the reader. Elsewhere in the "Angler" we are told that Cotton's servants "knew his certain hours" and that there was no tiresome waiting for dinner and supper. "How sweet are all things here!" the poet exclaims in "The Retirement," "How cleanly do we feed and lie! What good hours do we keep! How quietly we sleep! What peace!

<sup>1</sup> Complete Angler, Part II., chap. X.

What unanimity!" All must have been order, punctuality and cleanliness.

The surroundings of the Hall were no less delightful, to judge from Walton's comment upon "the pleasantness of the river, mountains, and meadows about it." Just behind the Hall, arose the hill that formed the western wall of Beresford Dale. It was along this green slope that Piscator and Viator walked in the early morning of their famous day of good sport and good conversation. They stood at the edge of the bluff, overlooking Beresford Dale. On a level with them were the bald hill-tops and open moorland of the Peak. Beneath them, in its idyllic glen, ran the "silver" Dove.

Viator said, "'Tis a delicate morning indeed; and I now think this a marvellous pretty place.

Piscator: Whether you think so, or no, you cannot oblige me more than to say so, and those of my friends who know my humour, and are so kind as to comply with it, usually flatter me that way. But look you, Sir, now you are at the brink of the hill, how do you like my river, the vale it winds through like a snake, and the situation of my little fishing house?

Viator: Trust me, 'tis all very fine; and the house seems at this distance a neat building.

Piscator: Good enough for that purpose; and here is a bowling green too, close by it; so, though I am myself no very good bowler, I am not totally devoted to my own pleasure, but that I have also some regard to other men's. And now, Sir, you are

come to the door; pray walk in, and there we will sit, and talk as long as you please.”<sup>1</sup>

The little fishing house, here mentioned, was built to commemorate one of the most beautiful friendships of which we have record, that of Cotton and his hermetical father, Isaac Walton. But Walton, in fact, so Cotton tells us, saw it only a-building, and before the roof was on; in which case, nevertheless, he must have seen the famous “cipher stone” with the interlaced initials, above the door, and resting on it, the large square stone, with its legend “Piscatoribus Sacrum, 1674.” It was not here therefore, but in the cheerful parlor at the Hall that we must imagine the two actual sportsmen conversing in their parabolic vein before and after the day’s outing. But doubtless they often seated themselves upon the grass to talk near the spot where the fishing house now stands as a monument to their friendship.

And when Piscator and Viator, as Cotton represents them in his part of the “Angler,” entered the fishing house, they found themselves in a room about fifteen feet square, paved with black and white marble, its walls covered, from the pavement to the ceiling, with paneled wainscoting. In the large panels were painted scenes of fishing, and in the smaller the various sorts of tackle and implements used. On the left side, opposite the door, was a fireplace; and on the right, a large “beaufet” with folding doors whereon were portraits of Cotton, Walton, and a boy servant. Underneath the beaufet was a cupboard, on the door of which were

<sup>1</sup> Angler, Part II., chap. III.

painted a trout and a grayling. In the center of the room was a black marble table, supported by two stone feet. At this table Piscator and Viator "sate them down," and while Piscator smoked the pipe of tobacco "which," said he, is "always my breakfast," the two discoursed on the secrets of angling.

A few paces from the door of the fishing house was "Pike Pool." Here a conical shaft of limestone, covered with lichens and creepers, rose from the bed of the stream to the height of thirty or forty feet. About its base the Dove had dug herself a deep pool. On the Derby side a wall of rock rose from the water; on the Stafford side a lawn stretched back to the hill over which Piscator and Viator had come conversing. At this point the anglers first tried their skill.<sup>1</sup> "What have we got here?" asked Viator, "a rock springing up in the middle of the river! this is one of the oddest sights that ever I saw." The place is still as Viator saw it. It is a spot of absolute quiet and seclusion; the silence is broken only by the Dove chattering over little stone weirs. Such a place fishermen often see in dreams.

We need not follow Piscator and Viator farther. Theirs was a successful day; "Go thy way, little Dove!" exclaimed Viator in the evening, "thou art the finest river ever I saw and the fullest of fish." Perhaps they were at the moment returning to the Hall by way of the foot-path leading up the Staffordshire bank of the Dove to the top of the hill from which, in the morning, they had looked down upon Beresford Dale.

<sup>1</sup> Angler, Part II., chap. VI.

The path ran near two objects that have interest for us. Near the summit of the hill was the tower alluded to by Cotton in an "Epistle to John Bradshaw, Esq." In this epistle the poet describes a journey from London to Beresford Hall by way of St. Albans, Stratford and Lichfield. He came at night-fall of the fifth day within sight of his "Hero's Tow'r," from which the light of "her flambeaux" beacons him to his "long long'd-for Harbour of delight." And not far from the tower was a narrow cleft in the rock wide enough to allow one person to pass through. It opened into a large hollow, in the solid rock. To-day this cavity is known as "Cotton's Hole." It is probably one of the caves which the poet apostrophizes in "The Retirement."

"Oh, my beloved caves!

What safety, privacy, what true delight  
In th' artificial night  
Your gloomy entrails make,  
Have I taken, do I take!  
How oft, when grief has made me fly  
To hide me from society,  
Ev'n of my dearest friends, have I  
In your recesses' friendly shade  
All my sorrows open laid,  
And my most secret woes entrusted to your  
privacy!"

If we combine into one conception the necessity which drove the poet to lodge with "hard favoured grief" in the gloomy entrails of his beloved rocks; and the grateful pleasure which he found in the

sweetness and seclusion of Beresford Dale, in the innocent sport which the "fair Dove" afforded him and in the cleanliness and order of the domestic life at the Hall, we may realize somewhat the manner of man Cotton was, and we may value at its true worth the frank and winning revelation of the man given by his poetry.

No record remains of his boyhood and youth at Beresford. From the place itself we may guess how these years passed. The Dove was near, in which a boy might fish and bathe; hills and caves afforded adventure; flowers and nuts were there to be gathered, and animals to be tamed, such as the little marten to which he later addressed some charming lines. There were excursions to Hartington on market days, and visits from time to time to the world of fashion at Buxton. During the long "Peak" winter, there were studies to be mastered, a routine relieved by indoor amusements and by the festivities of the English yule-tide.

There was of course a period of school life, but of it likewise no record is left. It was, perhaps, during his school days that Cotton was called upon to bear his first great sorrow, the sudden death of his mother at the age of thirty-eight. Tradition says that she was a woman of great beauty, of much intellect, and of extreme gentleness; Charles was her only child, and the two were, no doubt, very dear to each other. She was buried at Bentley, the ancient seat of her family. To her, Sir Aston Cokaine inscribed the following epitaph:

“Passenger, stay, and notice take of her,  
Whom this sepulchral marble doth inter :  
For Sir John Stanhope’s daughter, and his heir  
By his first wife, a Beresford, lies here.  
Her husband of a noble house was, one  
Everywhere for his worth belov’d and known,  
One only son she left, whom we presage  
A grace t’ his family, and to our age.

Now thou may’st go ; but take along with thee  
(To guide thy life and death) her memory.”

From tradition we learn that Cotton’s father took great interest in his son’s education. He took a hand in it personally by choosing authors for translation, and by setting the boy themes for practice in writing. That the elder Cotton was in this respect a competent mentor for his son there can be no doubt. We have only to recall Herrick’s praise of his fine taste in poetry, and Walton’s testimony to his gift for description. Under these circumstances, it was perhaps not a matter of great moment whether or not the poet had a college training. The tradition is persistent that he was sent to Cambridge, though Mr. Bullen considers this not proved. Nevertheless, he somehow acquired a knowledge of the classics equal at least to that of a Cambridge graduate, and he became early in life widely read in French and Italian literature. Sir Aston Cockaine, in “Poems of Diverse Sorts,” 1658, addressed an epistle “To my Cousin, Mr. Charles Cotton, the younger,” in which the following lines occur,

"In how few years have you rais'd up an high  
Column of learning by your industry."

And again, in the same volume, Sir Aston says,

"D'Avila, Bentivoglio, Guicciardine,  
And Machiavil the subtle Florentine,  
In their originals I have read through,  
Thanks to your library and unto you.

. . . . .

When you have more such books, I pray vouch-  
safe  
Me their perusal."

This seems to contradict the inference of Macaulay in a note to his *History of England* (chap. iii) as to the scarcity of books in country places in the seventeenth century, an inference drawn by Macaulay from the fact that "Cotton seems, from his Angler, to have found room for his whole library in his hall window: and Cotton was a man of letters." Cotton did his translations at Beresford; from this it would seem that he may have had about him there a library of considerable size.

The first published verses of Cotton appeared in Richard Brome's "*Lachrymae Musarum*," 1650, a volume of elegies written by "divers persons of Nobility and Worth, upon the death of the most hopefull Henry Lord Hastings." Among the contributors to this volume, besides Cotton, were Thomas Bancroft, Sir Aston Cokaine, Alexander Brome, Sir John Denham, Andrew Marvell, and Robert Herrick. Though Cotton was but nineteen



years of age, his elegy is far from being the poorest in the volume; it is one of the best. It is conventional, like most of the others; but it shows no glaring faults in taste, and it was evidently written with the poet's eye upon the object. Two years later he prefixed commendatory verses to Edmund Prestwick's translation of Seneca's "Hippolytus." Belonging to about this time are several interesting poems, to be found in the posthumous volume of "Occasional Poems." Among these is "An invitation to Phillis," a variation upon Marlowe's theme "Come live with me and be my love." The setting for the poem is evidently Beresford Dale,

"Come live with me, and be my love,  
And thou shalt all the pleasures prove,  
The mountains towering tops can show  
Inhabiting the Vales below.  
From a brave height my Star shall shine <sup>1</sup>  
T' illuminate the desert Clime.  
Thy Summer's bower shall overlook,  
The subtil windings of the Brook,  
For thy delight which only springs  
And cuts her way with Turtles Wings."

Further on the Dove is specifically mentioned,

"Where crystal Dove runs murm'ring still."

The companion piece to this, "The Entertainment to Phillis" should also be mentioned; it is equally "sweet," musical, and sensuous:

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the "Hero's Tow'r" mentioned above.

“I have such Fruits too, for thy taste,  
As teeming Autumn never grac’t,  
Apples, as round, as thine own Eyes;  
Or, as thy Sister Beauties prize,  
Smooth, as thy snowy Skin, and sleek  
And ruddy as the Morning’s cheek,  
Grapes, that the Tyrian purple wear,  
The spritely Matrons of the Year,  
Such, as Lyaeus never bare,  
About his drowsy Brows, so fair,  
So plump, so large, so ripe, so good,  
So full of flavours, and of blood.”

In passing, it is worthy of mention that in these poems, and others of this period, Cotton shows a great fondness for alliteration, especially of the liquids, and of the s-sound that, instead of hissing, sings. Take for example,

“Sweet, as the milk of Sand-red Cow” ;

and again,

“Carpets where Flowers woven grow,  
Only thy sweeter steps to strew,  
Such as may emulation bring,  
To the wrought mantle of the Spring.”

Also of this period is the “Song Montross” ; Montross was captured and executed, May 21, 1650. “Laura Sleeping”<sup>1</sup> and “Laura Weeping,”<sup>2</sup> two beautiful lyrics, are likewise, to judge from evidences of poetic style, of this period:

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 519.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 521.

"Sweet sorrow drest in such a look,  
 As love would trick to catch desire;  
 A shaded Leaf in Beauties Book,  
 Charact'ed with clandestine Fire."<sup>1</sup>

These poems, as we have seen, are smooth and warmly colored, and it should be added, relatively impersonal. But in the "Eclogue. Damon. C. C. Thyrsis. R. R." a somewhat different note is struck. This eclogue was written, probably, about 1650; for Thyrsis says, evidently referring to the death of the King, January 30, 1649,

"'Las! who can sing? since our *Pan* dy'd  
 Each Shepherd's pipe is laid aside:  
 Our flocks they feed on parched ground,  
 Shelter, nor Water's for them found:  
 And all our sports are cast away,  
 Save when thou sing'st thy *Cœlia*."<sup>2</sup>

Damon replies,

"Cœlia, I do confess alone  
 My object is of Passion,  
 My Star, my bright Magnetick Pole,  
 And only Guidress of my Soul."<sup>3</sup>

Damon (C. C.) is obviously Cotton himself, and Thyrsis (R. R.) Ralph Rawson, his tutor. Ralph Rawson was in residence at Brasenose college, Oxford, in 1648, and was expelled by the Parliamentary visitors in that year. He was, about this time, Cot-

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 522.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 403.

ton's tutor either at Cambridge, or,—which is more probable,—his private tutor at Beresford.

It is altogether probable that the Cœlia of the eclogue is Cotton's distant relative, Isabella Hutchinson, the inspiration of many of the lyrics, written, say, between 1650 and the time of his marriage to her in 1656. She was the daughter of Sir Thomas Hutchinson of Owthorpe, by his second wife, Catherine, who was the daughter of Sir John Stanhope of Elvaston. There was opposition to the marriage from some quarters on the ground of too close a blood relationship; in "The Separation"<sup>1</sup> Cotton cries,

"But oh, th' unwelcome cause,  
Of superstitious Laws!  
That us, from our mutual embraces tear,  
And separate our bloods, because too near."

And again,<sup>2</sup>

"But I'll pursue her, till our flood agree,  
Alpheus I, and Arethusa she."

So far as the lovers themselves were concerned, love met love with "equal flame." The poet was in despair when his mistress was coy or when she was absent from him; but, on the whole, he indulged himself very little in conventional grief. More often he expressed doubt of his own worthiness. This note rings true whenever we find it. He seems to have been unwontedly clear-eyed, even circum-

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 347, stanza iii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

spect, from beginning to end. He expressed himself like one sobered rather than intoxicated by happiness. He seemed anxious, one might say, to avoid if possible the fatality of bliss. His appeal was egotistical, and yet it does not offend; it sprang from insight and sincerity, not from willful self-assertion. He realized, even in the heyday of passionate desire, that love cannot thrive long on self-abnegation. He knew that the best and the highest is nevertheless earth-born, that it is a flower which fades quickly when cut off from the stock on which it grows. By virtue of his sincerity he instinctively escaped the poetical dilemma of his age. He was too much of a realist to be a Platonist in love, and too wholesome to be a cynic. To illustrate his temper, take the fifth stanza of "Estrennes to Calista,"<sup>1</sup>

"You who my last love have, my first love had,  
To whom my all of love was and is paid,  
Are only worthy to receive  
The richest New years-gift I have.  
My love, which I this morning give,  
A nobler never Monarch gave  
Which each new-year I will present a-new  
And you'll take care, I hope, it shall be due."

The last line of this quotation illustrates what is meant by calling him a realist; it is by such fidelity to the mixed texture of human experience and human feeling, that, time and again, he wins conviction.

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 162.

As the time for his departure to France drew near, his love poems took on a tone of apprehension. He wished for an avowal from his betrothed which would hold him, in absence, true to himself at his best, and to her. He had no doubts of her constancy, —which is the finest compliment a lover can pay,— but he was not absolutely sure that he could be true to her and to himself:—

“ ’Tis my ador’d Diana, then must be  
The Guid’ress to this beaten Bark of mine,  
’Tis she must calm and smooth this troubled Sea,  
And waft my hope over the vaulting Brine:  
Call home thy venture Dian then at last,  
And be as merciful as thou art chaste.”

He took her picture with him, explaining why with disarming frankness:

“Then, Sweetest, would thy Picture turn  
My wandering eyes to thee at home.”

Upon trial of himself, however, he proved impervious to temptation, and announced naïvely in “The Retreat,”

“I’m returned, my Fair, but see  
Perfection in none but thee.”

Isabella must have had a rare amount of insight and good-sense, for there is a quality of love that would have cavilled at that. Evidently she did not, nor does the reader, who cannot help loving this lover, so scrupulously honest with himself and with

her. One believes him when he sings in the ode,  
"To Isabel":<sup>1</sup>

## I.

"Fair Isabel, if aught but thee  
I could, or would, or like, or love;  
If other Beauties but approve  
To sweeten my Captivity:  
I might those Passions be above,  
Those Pow'rful Passions that combine  
To make, and keep me only thine.

## II.

Or, if for tempting treasure I  
Of the World's God, prevailing Gold,  
Could see thy Love, and my Truth sold,  
A greater, nobler Treasury;  
My flame to thee might then grow cold,  
And I like one whose love is sense,  
Exchange thee for convenience.

## III.

But when I vow to thee, I do  
Love thee above or Health, or Peace,  
Gold, Joy, and all such Toys as these,  
'Bove Happiness and Honour too:  
Thou then must know, this love can cease,  
Nor change for all the glorious show  
Wealth, and Discretion bribes us to.

## IV.

What such a love deserves, thou, Sweet,  
As knowing best, may'st best reward;  
I, for thy bounty well prepar'd,

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 449.

With open arms my Blessing meet.  
Then do not, Dear, our joys detard;  
But unto him propitious be,  
That knows no love, nor life, but thee."

The marriage took place in 1656, upon Cotton's return from his travels in France and Italy. Before this event, he and his father had vested the manors of Bentley, Barrowashe, and Beresford, with other lands, in trustees, to sell off so much of the property as would pay a mortgage of £1700, and to hold the rest in trust for the younger Cotton and his heirs. The elder Cotton, who had greatly impoverished his estates by law-suits, died in 1658.

For the next ten or eleven years, the poet seems to have lived, very happily, the life of a country gentleman. Much of his time was taken up with the care of his estates; but, like his cousin Sir Aston Cokaine at the neighboring estate of Pooley, he found time for reading and study, and for the indulgence, as he puts it, of "an incurable humour of scribbling." During these years, many of his best lyrics were written. It seems probable that the "Summer Day Quatrains" were composed during the early years of his married life; and to these years, perhaps, should be assigned the fine ode to "Winter," which Wordsworth so much admired. Here, too, should be placed a number of amorous elegies and lyrics which seem to show the influence of certain French poets, in particular that of Malherbe, Voiture, Racan, and Théophile de Viaud. "The Battail of Yvry," a narrative poem based on French history, belongs also to these years,—i. e.,



the years just before the Restoration—as the concluding couplet of the last stanza indicates,

“Leaving fair France unto his brighter Ray  
May ev’ry injur’d Prince have such a Day.”

Belonging to this period, too, are some pieces of a satirical cast such as “The Litany,” probably written before 1660, and “The Joys of Marriage,” a poem of mildly satirical banter, in which is embedded the following characteristic tribute to his wife:

“Yet with me ’tis out of season  
To complain thus without reason,  
Since the best and sweetest fair  
Is allotted to my share:  
But alas! I love her so  
That my love creates my woe;  
For if she be out of humour,  
Straight displeased I do presume her  
And would give the World to know  
What it is offends her so:  
Or if she be discontented,  
Lord, how am I then tormented!  
And am ready to persuade her  
That I have unhappy made her:  
But if sick I then am dying,  
Meat and med’cine both defying:  
So uneasie is his Life  
Who is married to a Wife.”

At the Restoration, in 1660, Cotton published a panegyric in prose on Charles II. He was an ardent royalist. The only bitterly satirical verses that he ever wrote were those provoked from him

by Waller's eulogy on Oliver Cromwell. Nevertheless, neither he nor his father appears to have suffered any persecutions at the hands of the Commonwealth party. In an "Epode"<sup>1</sup> addressed to Alexander Brome, he expressed his joy at the return of the King:

"Now let us drink, and with our nimble Feet,  
The Floor in graceful measures beat;  
Never so fit a time for harmless Mirth  
Upon the Sea-girt spot of Earth.  
The King's returned!"

In the same poem, the following lines are found:

"Our Grievs once made us thirsty, and our Joy,  
If not allay'd, may now destroy,  
Light up the silent Tapers, let them shine,  
To give Complexion to our Wine;  
Fill each a Pipe of the rich Indian Fume  
To vapour Incense in the Room,  
That we may in that artificial shade  
Drink all a Night ourselves have made.  
No Cup shall be discharged, whilst round we sit,  
Without a smart report of wit,  
Whilst our Inventions quickened thus, and  
warm,  
Hit all they fly at, but not harm;  
For it Wit's mastery is, and chiefest Art  
To tickle all; but make none smart."

In 1664, Cotton began his burlesque writing, with the publication of "Scarronides, or the First Book of Virgil Travestie." Six years later, this book was reprinted, with a travesty of the "fourth book"

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 511.

added. During the poet's lifetime, six editions of "Scarronides" appeared. He seems always to have been ashamed of this, his most popular work, as many passing allusions in his epistles and elsewhere attest; but hard necessity drove him to burlesque, as from time to time it drove him to his caves. His only defense was that the age in which he lived required burlesque of him, and that he did it as well as he could. His best in this kind, we must admit, was better than that of any other, excepting Butler. Compared with the similar work of Mennis and Smith in the "Musarum Deliciae," Cotton's doggerel is fine art. It is almost never dull; it does not amble, nor trot; it gallops, as it should, with vigorous ease. Whatever may be the true judgment of his burlesque, it undoubtedly gave pleasure in its day. Pepys, for one, records on March 2nd, 1663-64, that, stopping on his way home at St. Paul's Church yard,—in spite of an eye "mightily out of order with rheum" he "there looked upon a pretty burlesque poem called 'Scarronides or Virgilian Travesty,' " which he found "extraordinary good."

It is interesting to note that the publication of the "Scarronides" synchronizes with a crisis in Cotton's financial affairs. Some time prior to the year 1664 he had applied to Parliament for power to sell part of his estates, in order to pay his debts. In 1665 this petition was favorably acted upon. Now the question rises, what was the cause of his constant pecuniary embarrassment? Was it due, as the usual impression seems to be, to the dissipations of a reckless *bon vivant*? Before an answer is given to this

question, let us recall one or two well-ascertained facts concerning the matter.

In the first place, it should be remembered that Cotton's estates came to him seriously encumbered. From the outset he was engaged in law-suits which he had inherited, in some degree, with the paternal estates. Moreover, his amiable weakness of generosity laid him open to the arts of designing men, and gave occasion to those pathetic references to ingratitude and neglect met with in the eclogues, odes, epistles, and elsewhere. Of these one may be cited, in passing: <sup>1</sup>

“The want of Wealth I reckon not distress,  
But of enough to do good offices.  
Which growing less those Friends will fall away;  
Poverty is the ground of all decay:  
With our Prosperities our Friendships end,  
And to misfortune no one is a Friend,  
Which I already find to that degree  
That my old Friends are now afraid of me,  
And all avoid me, as good men would fly  
The common Hangman's shamefull company.  
Those who by Fortune were advanced above,  
Being oblig'd by my most ready love,  
Shun me, for fear least my necessity  
Should urge what they're unwilling to deny,  
And are resolv'd they will not grant; and those  
Have shared my meat, my Money, and my Cloaths,  
Grown rich with others Spoils as well as mine  
The coming near me now do all decline,  
Least shame and gratitude should draw them in  
To be to me what I to them have been;  
By which means I am stripp'd of all Supplies  
And left alone to my own Miseries.”

<sup>1</sup> Eclogue: Poems, 1689, p. 108.

Such means of being "stripp'd of all supplies," taken in connection with inherited debts, and the unsettled condition of public affairs in his day, are in themselves sufficient to account for his straitened circumstances.

If we are careful to avoid unjust inferences, it may, however, be freely admitted that according to our standards Cotton was intemperate. On one occasion <sup>1</sup> he writes to his friend Bradshaw that having got as far as Uttoxeter on his way home from London, it being market-day,

"I was constrained with some kind lads to stay  
Tippling till afternoon, which made it night  
When from my Hero's Tower I saw the light  
Of her Flambeaux, and fancied as we drave  
Each rising Hillock was a swelling wave  
And that I swimming was in Neptune's spight  
To my long long'd-for Harbour of delight."

In the "Voyage to Ireland" <sup>2</sup> he stops at a way-side inn for refreshment, and finds "the best ale in England,"

"I speak it with tears  
Though I have been a Toss-pot these twenty good  
years,  
And have drank so much liquor has made me a  
Debtor."

Again, in an epistle to Sir Clifford Clifton <sup>3</sup> he describes himself as having,

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

"Grown something swab with drinking good Ale."

But in this same epistle<sup>1</sup> he also says, that though

"His delight is to toss the cann merrily round  
And loves to be wet,"

he nevertheless "hates to be drowned."

Such instances might be multiplied. Two considerations must be taken into account in attempting to estimate their value as indications of Cotton's habits and the probable consequences of them; namely, the attitude of the time toward drinking, and the conventions of private correspondence and of burlesque under which he so constantly spoke of himself as a "toss-pot." It is certain that he was not more, and may have been much less, indulgent to himself in this respect than the average gentleman of his time. It was a great time for drinking. Even grave divines consumed large quantities of wine. And Pepys, who was himself very often "fox'd with drink," tells of a lady who at one draught drank a pint and a half. The evidence which Cotton himself furnishes is not sufficient to prove him a drunkard, even if such evidence were to be taken literally, as of course it is not. Such evidence occurs mainly in epistles to intimate friends,—such friends as might have been expected to understand as well as to enjoy a decided touch of self-caricature. The other source of evidence is the "Voyage to Ireland in Burlesque." But here, obviously, the rules of burlesque must be applied to what the poet has said of his drinking, as well as to what he has said of

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 329.

himself in other respects. His confessions, if taken literally, might as easily prove that he was a bad poet as that he was a bad man, for he disparages his poor muse as well as himself. The zest of caricature, of course, depends upon exaggeration,—an exaggeration which by its evident falsity suggests the truth. An age which does not know the subject of the caricature may well be at a loss to distinguish false from true. What is perhaps plainest in these cartoons of Cotton is the glimpse they give of a charming personality. Such facts as they suggest of character and habits must be carefully weighed in the most delicate—and of necessity, uncertain—scales of criticism.

At about the time of this first crisis in his business affairs Cotton seems to have made strenuous efforts to retrieve his fortunes. The preface to his translation of the “Duke of Espernon” (published in 1669–70) shows that among other shifts he had sought public employment. But whatever this was, “it did not hold long.” Some light may possibly be thrown upon what this employment was by the following letter found by Mr. H. F. Wake in a folio of Cotton’s translations of the “Duke of Espernon,” formerly in the Tixall Library. The letter, Mr. Wake explains, though without name or date, is by careful comparison, in Cotton’s handwriting. It is given here for what it may be worth.

“Sir when I was last with you I acquainted you how Sir Thomas Ingram had acquainted me how he was by his Majestyes order to send down a comytion *to me* and others to exammyne dyvers wastes of-

fenses and losses his majesty suffered in Needwood and the Honor of Tutbury. I am through his Majestyes gratyouse Favor his lieutenant off the Forrest and his high Steward off the Honor of Tutbury. I then likewise tould you I conceaved I had reason to beelieve iff the commytyon weare Full itt would tuch some persons what would endeavor to avoyd itt and I have some assurance now it is so For the commytyon, a copy off which the Channcelor sent mee to peruse, is I conceive defective in what I Feared it would For itt gives us Full power to fynd out all trespasses in the woods and game but the greatest prejudice his Majesty suffers in is his grants of offyses; in grants off Lands concealements of Lands and incrochments. I have given Sir Tho: Ingram an answer by a letter For hee writt to me to know my opynyon off the commytyon."

"After being delivered from that employment,"—Cotton in the preface to the 'Duke of Espernon' says,—"I was taken off by so long and so uncomfortable a sickness, that I found myself utterly unfit for any undertaking of this, or any other kind, and consequently had almost given over all thought of proceeding in a work which at some melancholy times I believ'd I might not live to finish.<sup>1</sup> Being since restored to a better state of health, and coming to review my papers, either the dislike of what I had already done, the shame of having been so long in doing it, the indisposition my disease left still hanging upon me, the bulk of what I had undertaken, the little license I conceived I might have wherewith to

<sup>1</sup> A more intimate account of this sickness seems to be afforded by the epistle to Sir Clifford Clifton quoted below.



perform it, or all together, had almost persuaded me to hold on to ~~the same~~ resolution, and forever to let it alone: till recollecting myself I remembered I had a greater obligation upon me (which nevertheless I do not think fit to publish in this place) to go through with what I had already begun, than was to be dissolv'd by any truant humour, or private aversion of my own."

These words, written probably at the end of the year 1666, or the beginning of the following year, would seem in the light of what we know of his pecuniary difficulties about this time, to be an obvious allusion to them. Furthermore, if there should be any doubt as to his energy and patience in trying to conjure forth his muse when she was unwilling, the epistle to Sir Clifford Clifton may be quoted at length to dispel it. We see the poet, just out of his illness, start from his couch,

"Where I lay dull and muddy.  
Of my servants inquiring the way to my study  
For in truth of late days I so little do mind it  
Should one turn me twice about I never should find  
it."

Arrived at his study, he "brawls" for his muse (which, as he says, some call "invoking"), but she will not respond.

"I then fell to searching, since I could not leave her.  
I sought all the shelves, but never the nearer:  
I tumbled my Papers, and rifled each Packet,  
Threw my books all on heaps and kept such a  
racket

Disordering all things, which before had their  
 places  
 Distinct by themselves in several classes,  
 That who'd seen the confusion, and look't on the  
 ware,  
 Would have thought he had been at Babylon  
 Fair."

Evidently, in spite of his careless tone, he was ordinarily a methodical literary worker.

"At last, when for lost I had wholly resign't her  
 Where canst thou imagine, dear K<sup>nt</sup>, I should find  
 her?

Faith, in an old Drawer, I late had not been in,  
 'Twixt a coarse pair of sheets of the Housewife's  
 own spinning,  
 A Sonnet instead of a coif her head wrapping,  
 I happily took her small Ladiship napping.  
 Why how now, Minx, quoth I, what's the matter I  
 pray,  
 That you are so hard to be spoke with to day?  
 Fy, fy on this Idleness, get up, and rouse you,  
 For I have a present occasion to use you:  
 Our Noble Mecaenas, Sir Clifford of Cud-con,  
 Has sent here a Letter, a kind and a good one:  
 Which must be suddenly answer'd, and finely,  
 Or the Knight will take it exceeding unkindly;  
 To which having some time sat musing and mute,  
 She answer'd sh'ad broke all the strings of her Lute;  
 And had got such a Rheum with lying alone,  
 That her voice was utterly broken and gone:

"Besides this, she had heard <sup>1</sup> that of late I had made  
 A friendship with one that had since bin her Maid;  
 One Prose, a slatternly ill-favour'd toad,

<sup>1</sup> A reference, no doubt, to Cotton's work on the translation of the "Duke of Espernon."

As common as Hackney, and beaten as Road,  
 With whom I sat up sometimes whole Nights together,  
 Whil'st she was exposed to the Wind and weather.  
 Wherefore, since that I did so slight and abuse her,  
 She likewise now hop'd I would please to excuse  
 her."

He now tries to regain his muse's favor by representing to her the lure of fame.

"Which she so much despised, she pish't at the  
 name;  
 And told me in answer, that she could not glory at  
 The Sail-bearing Title of Muse to a Laureat,  
 Much less to Rhymer, did nought but disgust one,  
 And pretended to nothing but pittiful Fustian  
 But oh, at that word, how I rated, and call'd her,  
 And had my Fist up, with intent to have maul'd  
 her:  
 At which, the poor Minx, half afraid of the matter  
 Changing her note, 'gan to wheedle and flatter;

Being thus made Friends, we fell to debating  
 What kind of Verse we should congratulate in:  
 I said 't must be Doggrel, which when I had said,  
 Maliciously smiling, she nodded her head  
 Saying Doggrel might pass to a friend would not  
 show it,  
 And do well enough for a *Derbyshire* Poet."

The epistle goes on to congratulate Sir Clifford upon his election to Parliament, advises him to give money to His Majesty, to beware falling out with his betters, and to avoid treason. It ends with an interesting description of the poet by himself.

“Farewell then, dear Bully, but ne’re look for a  
 Name  
 For, expecting no honour, I will have no shame;<sup>1</sup>  
 Yet, that you may gness at the Party that writes  
 t’ee,  
 And not grope in the dark, I’ll hold up these Lights  
 t’ee.

He always wants Money, which makes him want  
 ease,  
 And he’s always besieg’d, tho himself of the Peace,  
 By an Army of Duns, who batter with Scandals,  
 And are Foemen more fierce than the Goths or the  
 Vandals.

But when he does rally, as sometimes he does,  
 Then hey for Bess Juckson, and a Fig for his Foes:  
 He’s good Fellow enough to do every one right  
 And never was first that ask’t, what time of Night:  
 His delight is to toss the cann merrily round,  
 And loves to be wet, but hates to be drown’d:  
 He fain would be just, but sometimes he cannot,  
 Which gives him the trouble that other men ha’ not.  
 He honours his Friend, but he wants means to show  
 it,

And loves to be rhyming, but is the worst Poet.  
 Yet among all these Vices, to give him his due,  
 He has the Vertue to be a true Lover of you.”

At about the date of this epistle to Sir Clifford Clifton, Cotton became a captain in the Earl of Chesterfield’s regiment of foot; this was a part of a levy raised in anticipation of a land invasion by the Dutch, who in June of 1667 burned Sheerness,

<sup>1</sup> An allusion, perhaps, to his feeling about the “Scarronides,” anonymously printed in 1664; he was at this time at work on the “fourth book” of it, which was published in 1670.

entered the Medway, and sailed to within twenty miles of London. England was much alarmed. Pepys makes this jotting, on the twelfth of June: "The newes is true, that the Dutch have broke the chaine and burned our ships, and particularly 'The Royal Charles'; other particulars I know not, but most sad to be sure. And the truth is I do fear so much that the Kingdom is undone." Cotton and his regiment had, a few days before, passed through London on their way to Harwich, where the militia was assembling. On the ninth of June, Pepys had recorded "In comes my Lord Berkeley who is going down to Harwich also to look after the militia there; and there is also the Duke of Monmouth, and with a great many young Hectors, the Lord Chesterfield, My Lord Mandeville, and others." No more definite record remains of Cotton's military service. Perhaps, as he said of his other public employment, it "did not hold long," though there is some reason to believe that three years later he went to Ireland in a quasi-military capacity. Chesterfield's regiment was in commission for only a short time, being disbanded soon after the conclusion of the peace with Holland, on the twenty-first of July, 1667.<sup>1</sup>

For the following year and a half we have no record of Cotton, unless, as seems probable, an epistle to John Bradshaw<sup>2</sup> belongs to this time. In this, after a vivid description of a journey from Lon-

<sup>1</sup> Calendar of State Papers: 1667. Pepys, 12 June, 1667; *ibid.*, 9 June, 1667. Dalton, *Army Lists*, i, 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Poems*, 1689, p. 83.

don to Beresford, he gives the following characteristic account of himself:—

“And now I’m here set down again in peace,  
After my troubles, business, Voyages,<sup>1</sup>  
The same dull Northern clod I was before,  
Gravely enquiring how Ewes are a Score,  
How the Hay-Harvest and the Corn was got  
And if, or no, there’s like to be a Rot:  
Just the same sot I was e’er I remov’d,  
Nor by my travel, nor the Court improv’d;  
The same old fashion’d Squire, no whit refin’d  
And shall be wiser when the Devil’s blind.”

In the spring of 1669, his wife, whom he deeply loved, died. She was buried at Alstonfield on the twenty-sixth of April. As issue of this marriage there had been eight children; five were living. Beresford, the eldest, and the only son, was but twelve years of age. Perhaps we may now begin to understand what Cotton must have had at heart when he wrote in the preface to the “Duke of Espernon,” à propos of his impulse to abandon that work, and his remembrance of the obligation that urged him on to it, “I therefore reassum’d my former purpose, and some months since (probably 1668–69) took the book again, in good earnest in hand, which when I have said, any ingenious person may reasonably wonder how a man, in good earnest, and that has so little to do in the world as I have, could be all this tedious

<sup>1</sup> By “Voyages” it is probable that he means “journeys.” Cf. “A Voyage to Ireland in Burlesque,” in which only a description of travel by land is given.

time about such a piece of work as this. To which (if what I have already said will not serve for an excuse) I shall answer, that, although by my incapacity, my ill fortune, or both, I stand excus'd from publick employment, I have notwithstanding so much private concern of my own to divert me, and so few moments to bestow upon myself, that I wonder 'tis done so soon: an apology I might however have spar'd, since my haste will I fear be legible in every line."

The "History of the Life of the Duke of Esperron: the great favorite of France" was published in the year 1669-70. It covered the period of French history "from the year 1598, when D'Avila leaves off, down to our own times, 1642." It was dedicated to Gilbert, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, one of His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council. Of this dedication Cotton says "I have . . . been prompted thereunto by an honest Vanity I have, the World should take notice, that how private soever my life has been, I have not altogether convers'd with Obscurity: but that I have had the Honour to be sometimes known unto, and to have been Favour'd by one of the greatest Prelates, and the best men upon Earth." In the same "humour," modestly his own, he affirms in the preface that his motives in making the translation were not "any design of advantage, that consideration being ever very much below my thoughts: not to oblige the world, that being above my expectations; but having an incurable humour of scribbling upon me, I believ'd I could not choose a braver subject for my

Friends' diversion, my own Entertainment than this.  
 . . . It was not therefore out of any ambition  
 I had to be again in Print, I having suffer'd too  
 much that way already." This reference is evi-  
 dently to the "Scarronides," and the unwelcome  
 reputation that it gave him. He did not, however,  
 on account of this feeling, desist from the writing of  
 burlesque. In this same year, he reprinted the  
 "Scarronides" with a travesty of the fourth book of  
 Virgil added. It proved to be very popular, going  
 through nine editions during the author's lifetime.

In May of this year (1670) he made a journey, or  
 as he called it, a "voyage" to Ireland. His expe-  
 riences on the way from Beresford to Wales are  
 given in the burlesque poem, "A Voyage to Ire-  
 land." It affords us many interesting glimpses of  
 the poet. At forty years of age he might well, he  
 says, be considered wiser than to run such errands as  
 these, though in his youth, he

" . . . was one of those People  
 Would have gone a great way to have seen an high  
 steeple

But to tell you the truth on't, indeed it was neither  
 Improvement nor pleasure for which I went  
 thither;"

It was necessity, as he explains, that induced him  
 to go "to the place whereof *Nick* was asham'd."  
 At Chester he was invited to sup with the mayor,  
 the latter's eye having been caught by "a glorious



Gold Belt" that the poet wore. The occasion gives rise to a flow of the poet's mild satire, some of it directed—to our illumination—against himself:—

“Supper being ended, and things away taken,  
 Master Mayor's Curiosity 'gan to awaken;  
 Wherefore making me draw something nearer his  
     chair,  
 He will'd and requir'd me there to declare  
 My Country, my Birth, my Estates, and my Parts,  
 And whether I was not a Master of Arts;  
 And what the bus'ness was had brought me thither,  
 With what I was going about now and whither:  
 Giving me caution, no lye should escape me,  
 For if I should trip, he should certainly trap me.  
 I answer'd, my Country was fam'd *Staffordshire*;  
 That in Deeds, Bills, and Bonds, I was ever writ  
     Squire;  
 That of Land, I had both sorts, some good, and  
     some evil,  
 But that a great part on't was pawn'd to the  
     Devil;  
 That as for my Parts, they were such as he saw;  
 That indeed I had a small smatt'ring of Law,  
 Which I lately had got more by practice than read-  
     ing,  
 By sitting o' th' Bench, whilst others were plead-  
     ing;  
 But that Arms I had ever more studi'd than Arts,  
 And was now to a Captain rais'd by my desarts;  
 That the bus'ness which led me through Palatine  
     ground  
 Into *Ireland* was, whither now I was bound;”

What the business was, which led him into Ireland, it would be, all things considered, somewhat inter-

esting to know. But about that he is unwontedly reticent.

In 1671 he prepared for publication a translation of *Horatius* by Corneille. The *Horatius* was not, in fact, merely a translation; it contained a number of original songs and choruses, which according to Mr. Alfred Wallis in "Notes and Queries"<sup>1</sup> are to be found no where else in Cotton's published poetry. It is important to note that the preface to this adaptation shows that the translation prior to 1671 existed only in manuscript, and that it was done as early as 1665, for "the private amusement of a fair young lady," the poet's relative, Mrs. Stanhope Hutchinson. It would seem, therefore, that the work was not done originally for publication, but that now, under the stress of circumstances, it was put upon the market.

Two years later, 1673, the publisher, Henry Brome, brought out an unsigned work, entitled "The Compleate Gamester, or Instruction how to play at Billiards, Trucks, Bowls, and Chess: Together with all manner of usual and most gentile games, either on Cards or Dice. To which is added, The Arts and Mysteries of Riding, Racing, Archery, and Cock-fighting." This compilation, which was popular in its day, was republished several times before 1699, when its authorship was at last ascribed by the publisher to Charles Cotton, Esq. Its publication seems to be added proof that Cotton had been driven to "pot-boiling." That he was not altogether oc-

<sup>1</sup> "Notes and Queries," 6th S. vol. viii, 1883.

cupied with hack-work is indicated by the fact that his poem addressed to Walton on the "Life of Dr. Donne" also belongs to this year. But that he was mainly so occupied is open to little doubt. For in the next year, 1674, he published his translation of "The Commentaries of Blaise de Montluc, Mareschal of France, wherein are described all the combats, rencounters, skirmishes, battles, sieges, assaults, scalades, the taking and surprise of towns and fortresses, as also the defence and assaults of the besieged, etc." He was perhaps taking his captaincy somewhat seriously, and at the same time turning his interest in it to account. In the same year he published "The Fair One of Tunis, or the Generous Mistress; A new Piece of Gallantry, Out of French," the frontispiece of which represents a Knight in armor on horseback, receiving from Mars a spear entwined with laurel, and from Venus a chaplet. In this year, too, he wrote a set of commendatory verses which appeared with Thomas Flatman's volume of poems.<sup>1</sup>

For the most part, during the nine or ten years following the granting of his petition to Parliament in 1665 to be allowed to sell a part of his estates

<sup>1</sup> These verses, by the way, are of interest as expressing Cotton's generous though discriminating praise of a poet—one unlike himself—who has yet perhaps to receive his full measure of appreciation. Flatman,—says Cotton,—knew how to "reconcile frailty with Innocence,"

"The Love you write, Virgins and Boyes may read,  
And never be debauch't but better bred;  
For without love, Beauty would bear no price,  
And dulness, than desire's a greater vice."

in order to pay his debts, Cotton was engaged, then, as we have seen, in trying to stem the tide of his misfortunes. He seems not to have been lacking either in resources or in energy. Yet, as subsequent events show, his efforts had been of little avail. He had obtained public employment, but soon "stood excused from it"; he had entered the army, but before he had seen any length of service, peace had been declared; then, from about 1670 onward, he had worked almost as a literary drudge, doing the bidding of the book-sellers, or adventuring on like speculations of his own. The epistle to John Bradshaw, written about this time (perhaps 1673-74), serves to recall this period of his life. Settled again at Beresford, he had begun, he says, "to live at the old rate,"

"To tub old Ale, which nonsense does create,  
Write lewd Epistles, and sometimes translate  
Old Tales of Tubs, of Guyenne and Provence  
And keep a clatter with th' old Blades of France  
As D'Avenant did with those of Lombardy,  
Which any will receive, but none will buy  
And that sets H. B.<sup>1</sup> and me awry."

Amid this bewilderment of private griefs, and public misfortunes, he bore himself for the most part with cheerfulness; one might say with a cavalier-like gayety of courage. Some of his occasional verses, it must be admitted,—such, for example, as the odes on "Poverty" and "The World"—were colored by his sorrow and defeat; but ad-

<sup>1</sup> H. B. Henry Brome, his publisher.

versity did not make him hoarse or mute; within his compass he sang with a clear voice that gave expression to a sound heart.

An episode of these years was his marriage to his distant relative, the Countess Dowager of Ardglass, eldest daughter of Sir William Russell, and widow of Wingfield, fifth Baron Cromwell. Just when the marriage took place is not known. The act of administration of Cotton's effects in 1695 speaks of the Countess of Ardglass as his widow. That the marriage took place sometime before 1675 a document soon to be given in abstract will show. In dealing with this passage in the poet's life Cotton's biographers have concerned themselves only with what would appear to be the obvious motive for such a marriage. Cotton was broken in fortune: he had a family of five young children: his distant kinswoman was a reasonable choice for the head of his household, particularly since she had a jointure of £1,500 a year. No doubt at Cotton's time of life these considerations had much weight with him. However, as to the jointure of £1,500 a year, there is some reason to believe that it was secured to his wife; it did not, at any rate, relieve his financial embarrassment. Convenience does not seem to have been the sole motive for his second marriage. Among his occasional poems there is a considerable number which have a tone of intimately discriminating praise rather than one of mere gallantry, but which, for all their evident sincerity, lack the morning freshness of his youthful verses to Isabella. It is not improbable that these were addressed to his

second wife. They express a feeling as genuine as was the love of his youth. Time, of course, has left its marks on the poet, and with characteristic honesty he makes no pretense to a sentiment which life perhaps grants only once. But in these verses if there is less of the early fire, there is no abatement of manly tenderness, and there is the added charm of a peculiar candor. The "Stanzas Irreguliers"<sup>1</sup> to Chloris, which begin with the more startling aspects of this candor, close with its more delicate shades.

## I.

"Lord! how you take upon you still!  
How you crow and domineer!  
How! still expect to have your will,  
And carry the Dominion clear,  
As you were still the same that once you were!

. . . . .

## VI.

And Faith, consult your glass, and see  
If I ha'n't reason on my side;  
Are those eyes still the same they used to be?  
Come, come, they're alter'd, 'twill not be deni'd;  
And yet, although the glass be true,  
And shew you, you no more are you,  
I know you'll scarce believe it,  
For Womankind are all born proud, and never,  
never leave it.

## VII.

Yet still you have enough, and more than needs,  
To rule a more Rebellious heart than mine;

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 118.

For as your eyes still shoot my heart still bleeds,  
And I must be a Subject still.

Nor is it much against my will,  
Though I pretend to wrestle and repine:  
Your Beauties still are in the height,  
And I must still adore,  
New Years, new Graces still create,  
Nay, maugre Time, Mischance and Fate,  
You in your very ruins shall have more,  
Than all the Beauties that have grac'd the world  
before."

This may be an expression of middle-aged sentiment, but it is a rare expression of the depth of it; paradoxical as it may seem, the romance of love remains, although stripped of illusion.

In the "Calendar of State Papers" for 1675 there is preserved an amended draft of a second Act enabling Charles Cotton, Esq., to sell lands in order to pay debts, and also to raise portions for his younger children. In the light of what we have seen of his ten years' struggle with adverse circumstances, this document becomes one of pathetic interest. It states that his wife Isabella was then dead; that she had left one son and four daughters, who were prevented, by their father's mortgages, and other incumbrances, from enjoying the advantages to which they were entitled under the previous settlement in 1665, and that, therefore, he was willing to divest himself of his title to his property for the payment of his debts, which, together with £2,000 to be raised for his daughters' portions, amounted to about £8,000. Parliament, therefore, enacted that all his lands should be "vested in trus-

tees who should allow him to retain Beresford Hall, and to receive the sum of forty pounds per annum during his own life, and the life of the Right Hon. Dame Mary, Countess Dowager of Ardglass, and after her decease the sum of sixty pounds yearly above the said annuity as long as he might live; that as much land should be sold as would pay his debts, and raise £2,000 for his daughters' portions and that the rest of his estates should be conveyed to his only son, Beresford Cotton, and the heirs of his body, with remainder to the heirs of his father."

In view of these facts it seems significant that in this year, 1675, he published the "Burlesque upon Burlesque, or the Scoffer Scoft, being some of Lucian's Dialogues, newly put into English Fustian." It was frequently reprinted; burlesque seems to have been the poet's one sure source of revenue.

In the following year (1676) he published his most famous original work in prose, a treatise on fly-fishing, which was added as a "Second Part" to the fifth edition of Walton's "Complete Angler." Prefixed was an epistle, dated 10th March, 1675-76, "To my most worthy father and friend, Mr. Isaak Walton, the elder," in which Cotton says that his treatise had been hurriedly written in ten days. Nevertheless, the "Second Part" is not unworthy of its place beside the first. It has been successfully adapted to the form of the "First Part," and though it lacks somewhat the peculiar charm of its prototype, it is perhaps rather better than its model when considered as a book of practical in-



struction for anglers. At the end of this "Second Part" Walton had his publishers print the verses by Cotton entitled "The Retirement" (which, Walton declared to his friend, "will make any reader that is blest with a generous soul, to love you the better), and also an epistle from himself to Cotton which may be quoted as one of the few records that remain of the charming friendship between the two.

"To my most Honored Friend

"Charles Cotton, Esq.

"Sir,—You now see, I have return'd you, your very pleasant, and useful discourse of the Art of Fli Fishing Printed, just as 'twas sent me: for I have been so obedient to your desires, as to endure all the praise you have ventur'd to fix upon me in it. And when I have thank't you for them, as the effects of an undissembled love: then, let me tell you, Sir, that I will endeavor to live up to the character you have given me, if there were no other reason; yet for this alone, that you, that love me so well, may not, for my sake, suffer by a mistake in your judgment.

"And, Sir, I have ventur'd to fill a part of your Margin, by way of Paraphrase, for the Reader's clearer understanding, the situation both of your Fishing-House, and the pleasantness that you dwell in. And I have ventur'd also to give him a copy of Verses, that you were pleas'd to send me, now some years past; in which he may see a good picture of both; and, so much of your own mind too, as will make any Reader that is blest with a Generous soul, to love you the better. I confess, that for doing this you may justly judge me too bold: if you do, I will say so too: and so far commute my offence, that, though I be more than a hundred miles from

you, and in the eighty-third year of my Age, yet I will forget both, and next begin a pilgrimage to beg your pardon, for, I would dye in your favour: and till then will live,

“Sir,  
“Your most affectionate  
“Father and Friend,  
“Izaak Walton.

“London, April 29th, 1676.”

The friendship of Cotton and Walton continued to the latter's death. In Walton's will (dated August 16, 1683), Cotton was among those named to receive a ring with the motto "A friend's farewell." To the 1675 edition of Walton's "Lives" Cotton prefixed a copy of commendatory verses dated 17th January, 1672-73, in which he speaks of Walton as "the best friend I now or ever knew," and in the "Second Part" of the Angler he attempts with humorous delicacy to express what the older man's affection meant to him. "My opinion of Mr. Walton's Book," he says in the character of Piscator, Junior, "is the same with every man's that understands anything of the Art of Angling, that it is an excellent good one, and that the fore-mentioned Gentleman understands as much of Fish and Fishing as any man living: but I must tell you farther, that I have the happiness to know his person, and to be intimately acquainted with him, and in him to know the worthiest man and to enjoy the best and truest Friend any man ever had; nay, I shall acquaint you further, that he gives me leave to call him father, and I hope is not yet asham'd to own

me for his adopted son. . . . My father Walton will be seen twice in no man's company he does not like, and likes none but such as he believes to be honest men, which is one of the best arguments I have, that I either am, or that he thinks me one of those, seeing I have not yet found him weary of me." And how delightful the companionship of the older and the younger man was may be gathered from the Angler.<sup>1</sup> "All this," exclaims Piscator, on one occasion, at a bold suggestion from his pupil, "in a strange river and with a fly of your own making! Why, what a dangerous man are you!"

And Viator replies:

"I, sir, but who taught me? *Damoetas* says by his man *Dorus*, (Arcadia) so you may say by me.

. . . "If my man such praises have  
What then have I, that taught the knave?"

Cotton's pleasure in the companionship is further expressed in his verses inviting Walton to visit Beresford.

"If the all-ruling Powers please  
We live to see another May,  
We'll recompense an Age of these  
Foul days in one fine fishing day.

. . .  
A day without too bright a Beam,  
A warm, but not a scorching sun,  
A southern gale to curl the stream,  
And (master) half our work is done.

<sup>1</sup> The Complete Angler, ed. Hawkins, p. 37.

We'll think ourselves in such an hour  
Happier than those, though not so high,  
Who, like Leviathans, devour  
Of meaner men the smaller Fry.

This (my best Friend) at my poor Home  
Shall be our Pastime and our Theme,  
But then should you not deign to come  
You make all this a flatt'ring Dream."

We cannot, perhaps, resist the hope that the poet enjoyed in Walton's company more than one such reprieve from the worry of debt, the drudgery of hack-work, and the uncongenial task of forcing his Muse to make faces at herself in burlesque. What at times this worry and drudgery meant to him we get a hint from verses like these: <sup>1</sup>

## I.

"Fy! What a wretched World is this?  
Nothing but anguish, griefs and fears,  
Where, who does best, must do amiss,  
Frailty the Ruling Power bears  
In this our dismal Vale of Tears.

## II.

Oh! who would live, that could but dye,  
Dye honestly, and as he shou'd,  
Since to contend with misery  
Will do the wisest Man no good,  
Misfortune will not be withstood.

Grant me then, Heav'n, a wilderness,  
And there an endless Solitude,

<sup>1</sup> The World: Poems, 1689, p. 291.

Where though Wolves howl, and Serpents hiss,  
 Though dang'rous, 'tis not half so rude  
 As the ungovern'd Multitude.  
 And Solitude in a dark Cave,  
 Where all things husht, and silent be,  
 Resembleth so the quiet Grave,  
 That there I would propose to flee,  
 With Death, that hourly waits for me."

Such contemplative poems as "The Retirement,"<sup>1</sup> "To my dear and most worthy Friend, Mr. Isaak Walton,"<sup>2</sup> "Contentment,"<sup>3</sup> "To Mr. John Bradshaw, Esq.,"<sup>4</sup> and "Poverty"<sup>5</sup> belong without doubt to this latter period of the poet's life; to the years, say, between 1670 and 1680. But his vivacity is unexhausted; in an "Anacreontic," written 1680, —when he was "fifty Winters old,"—we find him singing,

"Fill a Bowl of lusty Wine,  
 Briskest Daughter of the Vine;  
 Fill't untill it Sea-like flow,  
 That my cheek may once more glow.

Wine breeds Mirth, and mirth imparts  
 Heat and Courage to our hearts,  
 Which in old men else are lead,  
 And not warm'd would soon be dead."

In 1681, he published "The Wonders of the Peak," a descriptive poem somewhat after the manner of Hobbes' "De Mirabilibus Pecci," and dedicated to

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

"Elizabeth, Countess of Devonshire, with all acknowledgment and devotion." The pictures in this poem are often vividly clear, and the legends connected with some of the "wonders" are told with spirit and humor. Burlesque and real admiration are quaintly mingled. The poet knew his public, and here again, yielded to its taste.

In 1685-6 he published his translation of Montaigne's Essays, dedicating it to George Savile, Marquis (or at that time Earl) of Halifax. It ranks among the acknowledged masterpieces of translation.

Cotton died in February, 1687, four years after the death of his old friend Walton. The entry "1686-1687, Feb. 16, Charles Cotton" appears in the burial register of St. James, Piccadilly. A contemporary MS. diary (quoted by Oldys) records that the poet died of a fever when in his fifty-sixth year.

It seems almost certain—from the evidence which follows—that the epistle,<sup>1</sup> addressed to the Earl of —, was written near the end of the poet's life. He enjoyed at that time the close friendship of the brilliant George Savile, Earl (afterwards Marquis) of Halifax, to whom as we have seen he dedicated his "Montaigne." Bits of description of the Earl of — are entirely applicable to the Earl of Halifax. The Earl was almost exactly of Cotton's age, and Cotton in this epistle, says:

"We do on our last Quarter go,"

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 274.

referring perhaps to both himself and the Earl, adding, of himself,

“I may, perhaps, with much ado,  
Rub out a Christmas more or two  
Or if the Fates be pleas'd, a Score,  
But never look to keep one more.”

He must have been at least fifty years of age—which supposition would place the poem sometime after the year 1680—in order to have passed, or to have been upon the point of passing into the “last quarter” of life. But there is reason to believe that he was some years older, for, a “Collection of Diverting Sayings, Stories, characters, etc.,” in verse and prose, supposed to have been made by him about the year 1686 and, after his death found in manuscript in the library of the Earl of Halifax, seems to fit remarkably well into the following quotation from the epistle we are speaking of :

“Some three Months hence, I make account  
My Spur-gall'd Pegasus to mount,  
When, whither I intend to go,  
My Horse, as well as I, will Know;  
But being got with much ado,  
Out of the reach a Stage or two,  
Though not the conscience of my shame,  
And Pegasus fall'n desp'rate lame,  
I shake my stirrups, and forsake him,  
Leaving him to the next will take him;  
Not that I set so lightly by him,  
Would any be so kind to buy him;  
But that I think those who have seen  
How ill my Muse has mounted been,  
Would certainly take better heed,

Than to bid money for her Steed.  
Being then on foot, away I go,  
And bang the hoof, *in cognito*,  
Though in condition so forlorn,  
Little Disguise will serve the turn."

That in 1686 the poet was still living upon his estate seems to appear from an item in Plat's "Natural History of Staffordshire"—a work licensed to be printed in April, 1686—which mentions the author's "most worthy friend, the worshipful Charles Cotton of Beresford, Esquire," and "his pleasant mansion at Beresford." But only a year later, the poet had died in obscure circumstances in London. The touching epistle to Lord Halifax would seem then to have been written on the eve of his final departure from Beresford. The following lines from it furnish their own comment upon the circumstances that had fallen out for him, as well as upon his quality of courage:

"We do on our last Quarter go,  
And that I may go bravely out,  
Am trowling merry Bowl about,  
To Lord, and Lady, that and this,  
As nothing were at all amiss,  
When after twenty days are past,  
Poor Charles has eat and drunk his last.

No more Plum-porridge then, or Pye,  
No Brawn with Branch of Rosemary,  
No chine of Beef, enough to make  
The tallest Yeoman's chine to Crack;  
No bag-pipe humming in the Hall,  
Nor noise of House-keeping at all,



Nor sign, by which it may be said,  
This House was once inhabited."

It was a farewell spoken with his old cheerful smile, but it has a wistful cadence of regret.

In the act of administration of Cotton's effects, one Elizabeth Bludworth was mentioned as his principal creditor (Beresford Cotton, Esq.; the honorable Mary, Countess-Dowager of Ardglass, his widow; Olive Cotton, Catherine Cotton, Jane Cotton, and Mary Cotton, his natural and lawful children first renouncing) and was dated 12 September, 1687. Beresford Cotton, his son and heir, was living at Nottingham, 11 January, 1688, as the following baptismal entry in the parish register of St. Mary shows: "Stanhope, son of Mr. Berresford Cotton and Katherine." Beresford became a captain in the army under William the Third; Olive married the well-known divine and writer, George Stanhope, Dean of Canterbury; Katherine married Sir Berkeley Lucy of Braxbourne; Mary became the wife of Augustus Armstrong; Jane married Beaumont Perkyns of Sutton Bonington, and was the mother of Lucy, Countess of Northampton.

At the time of Cotton's death, he was at work on a translation of "The Memoirs of Monsieur de Pontis, who served in the French Army fifty-six years, under Henry IV, Lewis VIII, and Lewis XIV, Kings of France, containing many remarkable passages relating to the War, the Court, and the Government to those Princes." He was engaged, then, to the end of his life in supplying his public

with parallels to the evils of the time in England by means of translations from the French. Since the time of Oliver, royalists of a contemplative turn had fallen back on history and philosophy for encouragement, and example. In "Pastor Fido," 1647, a copy of which Cotton is known to have possessed in his youth, Sir Richard Fanshaw explains his purpose in translating as being that of furnishing his Prince with "the image of a gasping state (once the most flourishing in the world): A wild Boar (the sword) depopulating the Country: the Pestilence unpeopling the Towns: their gods themselves in the merciless humane Sacrifices exacting bloody contributions from both: . . . Because it seems to me (beholding it at the best light) a Lantskip of those Kingdoms (your Royall Patrimony), as well in the former flourishing, as the purest distractions, thereof, I thought it not improper for your Princely notice at this time, thereby to occasion your Highness, even in your recreations, to reflect upon the sad Originall, not without hope to see it yet speedily made a perfect parallel through-out; and also your self a great Instrument of it." This purpose must have been Cotton's likewise in his heroic poem, "The Battail of Yvry," written about 1658, in which a French prince, traitorously dispossessed of his rights, is shown triumphantly regaining them at last. The poem ends with a couplet which is obviously an allusion to Cotton's exiled Prince:—

**"Leaving Fair France unto his brighter Bay—  
May ev'ry injur'd Prince have such a day."**

In this connection, Cotton's translation of "The Moral Philosophy of the Stoics," from the French of Du Voix is significant. It was done, as seems probable from the dedication to his friend and kinsman, John Ferrers, a year or two before the Restoration. And, indeed, the fine ode to "Winter," though of course not a translation, seems to bear interpretation as a political satire. Furthermore, Cotton, in his dedication of the "Duke of Espernon," emphasizes the fact that "a more Illustrious Image of Virtue, and Honour than is here represented in the Person of the Duke of Espernon, in my little Reading I have nowhere met with, a more exemplary Piety, a braver Courage, a more shining and unblemished Loyalty, more inviolate Friendships, nor a nobler Constancy in all the shocks of Fortune . . . ." And finally, the translation of Montaigne came at a time when the example of that gentle skeptic might be expected to do much toward abating the fanaticism of a hundred warring factions. Under the circumstances of the time, a safer and more effectual way of criticism is hard to imagine, or one more in accord with both Cotton's gentleness and his courage.

Two years after the poet's death, an unauthorized collection of his occasional poems was published. This volume is to be considered at length in the following section. For the present, we may say of these poems, what he himself has said of certain passages in the life of the admirable Duke of Espernon, that, though they are not "altogether to be

justified," there are "none that may not be slipt over amongst so many better pages, like a Counterfeit piece in a great summe of current gold."

## THE POETRY OF CHARLES COTTON

The volume of miscellaneous verse, entitled "Poems on Several Occasions," was published in 1689, two years after the poet's death. The publisher's preface to Cotton's translation of the "Memories of the Sieur de Pontis," 1694, asserts that the poet had himself made a collection of his poems for the press, but that, owing to the "ungenerous proceeding" of a piratical publisher, the printing of this authentic edition had been prevented. The collection of 1689 shows haste in compilation; no fewer than nineteen poems appear twice, and the typography throughout is so careless, especially in respect to the pointing, that one's impression in reading is frequently confused, or blurred. Nevertheless, after a careful consideration of the volume, evidences of deliberate intention in the arrangement of certain groups of poems give rise to the surmise that here, after all, we have the authentic collection referred to in the preface to the "Memories of the Sieur de Pontis." This is a surmise, however, which cannot be verified.

The volume may be considered as having two main divisions. The first comprises, for the most part, original poems; the second is made up altogether of translations. The original poems, exclusive of the repetitions referred to above, number 175; the translations, 80. The original poems may be classi-

fied under the following types: Amorous lyrics, including odes and elegies, number 59; Pindaric odes of the Cowleyan variety, 7; sonnets, 10; songs, 10; epigrams, 16; epitaphs, 5; burlesque epistles, and descriptive and narrative burlesques (in which are to be found much important biographical data), 17; eclogues, 2; sets of lines, 9; satires, 3; convivial lyrics, 3; paraphrases, 3; heroic poems, 2; one dialogue and one Christmas hymn; and finally, seven important miscellaneous lyrics, including "The New-year" and "The Retirement."

The translations are from the Latin, the Italian and the French. The French translations are of particular interest, and a subsequent part of this section is devoted to them. For the moment, it is sufficient to remark that the headings of not a few of the original poems point to French models, as for instance, *Les Amours*, *Estrennes*, *rondeau*, *viril-lai*; the word *épigramme* is used to indicate a poem not identical with the English epigram, and the phrase "stanzas irreguliers" is employed as subtitle for such poems as "The Retirement."

But before taking up the discussion of Cotton's indebtedness to the French, it will be best to consider certain native influences. Some of these have left only slight traces on his work. Traces of the so-called "Metaphysical School" are rare, even the Cowleyan odes being almost as simple and direct as poetic expression can be. The conceit, when employed, lacks serious intention. It is generally a playful touch, as in the last stanza of the song beginning, "Join once again, my Celia, Join":—

"Thanks, sweetest, now thou'rt perfect grown,  
 For by this last kiss I'm undone;  
 Thou breathest silent darts,  
 Henceforth each little touch will prove  
 A dangerous strategem in love,  
 And thou wilt blow up hearts."

Taking Cotton's poetry all in all, the conceit occurs so infrequently that the influence of the metaphysical poets upon him is almost negligible. Likewise, it may be said that the cynicism which was prevalent in his time left no deep impress on his work. When he does give expression to that mood, the result is a rough badinage which has difficulty in keeping its tone, and which invariably gives way in the end to obvious good-humour. In "Love's Triumph," for example, he starts off bravely enough:

"God Cupid's Power was ne're so shown  
 Since first the Boy could draw a bow,  
 In all past Ages, as this one,  
 This love-sick Age we live in now;  
 Now He and She from high to low,  
 Or Lovers are, or would seem so."

He goes on, indeed, to malign these too easy lovers, the young, the old, the foul, the fair; but in the end, as the hearty ring of the denunciation has all along suggested, he is discovered to be only mock serious:

"And yet there is, there is one prize,  
 Lock'd in an adamant Breast;  
 Storm that then, Love, if thou be'st wise,  
 A conquest above all the rest,

Her Heart, who binds all Hearts in chains,  
Castanna's Heart untouched remains."

So it is, over and over again; the discord is but preparation for the harmony. In brief, Cotton is too much a realist, in the best sense of that term, to be cynical; he is too catholic in his sympathies, and too humorous. This same manliness of temper saved him, moreover, from another affectation of his day, that of Platonic love. Here again, however, as in the case of the conceit and of the fashionable attitude of cynicism, he is not above making incidental use of the cult of Platonic love, and its vagaries. He makes it serve his turn, now and then, by way of graceful compliment. In the song, already quoted from, "Join once again, etc.," we find the following example:

"Each Kiss of thine creates desire,  
Thy odorous Breath inflames Love's fire,  
And wakes the sleeping coal:  
Such a Kiss to be I find  
The conversation of the Mind,  
And whisper of the Soul."

In this stanza, the quaint blending of sensuous and Platonic love, with its suggestion of *double entente*, is worth observing, since it directs us to Cotton's ultimate attitude toward love.

Among the native influences, under which he wrote, by far the most important was the sensuous hedonism of Carew. What in Carew especially attracted Cotton was the value the hedonist at-



tached to the fleeting and irrevocable present.  
Carew sings in "Persuasions to Love,"

"O love me, then, and now begin it,  
Let us not lose this precious minute;  
For time and age will work that wrack  
Which time and age can ne'er call back."

And Cotton in the ode "To Celia"<sup>1</sup> strikes almost precisely the same note:

"Ill Husbandry in Love is such  
A scandal to Love's pow'r,  
We ought not to misspend so much  
As one poor short-liv'd hour."

Carew writes again,

"O then, be wise, and whilst your season  
Affords you days for sport, do reason;  
Spend not in vain your life's short hour."

And Cotton, on his part, pleads,

"What such a love deserves, thou, sweet,  
As knowing best, may'st best reward;  
I, for thy bounty well prepar'd  
With open arms my blessing meet.  
Then do not, dear, our joys detard;  
But unto him propitious be  
That knows no love, nor life, but thee."

This note is struck frequently by both Cotton and Carew. But the evidences of Carew's influence do not stop with this. A somewhat casual survey of Carew's poems for points of resemblance between him and Cotton has yielded the following possible

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 8.

comparisons (in point of theme): Carew's "Secrecy Protested" with Cotton's "Sonnet" (How should'st thou love, and not offend); Carew's "A Prayer to the Wind" with Cotton's ode "Laura Sleeping"; Carew's "Mediocrity in Love Rejected" with Cotton's ode "To Chloris";<sup>1</sup> Carew's "Good Counsel to a Young Maid" and his second, "Good Counsel to a Young Maid" with Cotton's "Old Tityrus to Eugenia"; Carew's "To Her Absence, A Ship," with Cotton's "The Tempest"; Carew's "To the Painter" with Cotton's "To My Friend, Mr. Lely." These comparisons include only obvious cases. When subtle resemblances, such as the pace and turn of verse, the pitch of emotion, and the poetic quality, are taken into account the indebtedness of Cotton to Carew is seen to be more than superficial. A reader fresh from a perusal of Carew finds many echoes of his music in the amorous lyrics of Cotton.

Now, let us turn to an important difference between them. Cotton is often, for a moment, as hedonistic as Carew; but the mood with Cotton is not a prevailing one. It is frequently recurrent, but not persistent. Here, once more it must be said, Cotton's keen sense of reality will not permit him to rest secure with "this precious minute." He is usually found poised somewhere between the impetuosity of desire and the cool circumspection of good sense. In the ode "To Isabel," over against the impetuosity of

"Then do not, dear, our joy detard;"

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 55.

we find this expression of carefully evaluated feeling:

“But when I vow to thee I do  
 Love thee above, or health, or peace,  
 Gold, joy, and all such toys as these,  
 ’Bove happiness and honor too:  
 Thou then must know, this love can cease,  
 Nor change, for all the glorious show  
 Wealth and discretion bribe us to.”

This mood is clearly different from the hedonism of Carew; and with Cotton it is the predominating mood. As may be seen from the following quotation from Davenant’s preface to *Gondibert* (1650), this attitude of Cotton was not unrecognized in the criticism of his day. “Love,” says Davenant, “in the Interpretation of the Envious, is Softness; in the Wicked, good men suspect it for lust; and in the Good, some spiritual men have given it the name of Charity. And these are but terms to this which seems a more considered definition, that indefinite Love is Lust, and Lust when it is determin’d to one is Love. . . . They who accuse Poets as provokers of Love are enemies to Nature; and all affronts to Nature are offences to God, as insolences to all subordinate officers of the Crown are rudeness to the King. Love, in the most obnoxious interpretation, is Nature’s Preparative to her greatest work, which is the making of Life. And since the severest Divines of these latter times have not been asham’d publicly to commend and define the most secret dutys and entertainments of Love in the Married, why should not poets civilly

endeavor to make a Friendship between the Guests before they meet, by teaching them to dignifie each other with the utmost of estimation? And Marriage in Mankinde were as rude and unprepar'd as the hasty election of other Creatures, but for acquaintance, and conversation before it, and that must be an acquaintance of Mindes, not of bodye; and of the Minde Poesy is the most natural and delightful Interpreter." Let us compare with this, the second stanza of Cotton's "Estrennes to Calista":<sup>1</sup>

"Love is the Soul of Life, though that I know  
Is call'd Soul too, but yet it is not so,  
Not rational at least, untill  
Beauty with her diviner light  
Illuminates the groping will,  
And shews us how to chuse aright  
And that's first prov'd by th' objects it refuses,  
And by being constant then to that it chuses."

Cotton's attitude toward love, then, it may be repeated, was not that of the cynic who denied the divinity of love altogether, nor was it that of the Platonic idealist who detached worthy love entirely from the sensuous. Cotton's attitude is expressed succinctly in his words, "Love is the soul of life." His mood in its sensuousness has much in common with that of Carew; but it is after all essentially different, for he affirms that,

"Love by swift time, which sickly passions dread,  
Is no more measur'd than 'tis limited;"

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 162.

These two moods,—one almost identical with the prevailing mood of Carew, and the other almost diametrically opposed to that poet's hedonism,—Cotton tries to harmonize. At least, if he does not consciously try to harmonize them, he habitually brings them into juxtaposition, as if he intended thus to suggest a quality of love which otherwise he found inexpressible. In a word, he tries to find a point of stability between the impulse to see and describe things as they actually are, and the idealizing impulse to extenuate and veil. He attempts to harmonize clean and sane knowledge both of himself and of others with the intoxicating buoyancy of love. These two antagonistic moods, dramatically contending for mastery, give warmth and vital interest to the amorous lyrics of Cotton.

His translations from the French throw light upon his significance as a lyrical poet. There is a note in his work which is hard to account for, if one considers only his immediate predecessors and his contemporaries at home. That French literature, poetry and prose, appealed to him with unusual power, there is much evidence to prove. His interest in the French lyrists began probably a good while before his journey to France in 1655, and throughout his life thereafter he was employed from time to time either in translating, or in adapting, from the French.

Desportes (1546–1606) and Bertaut (1552–1611), two minor Ronsardists, are the earliest of the French lyrists to find a place in his translations. Each is represented by a single poem, the one from

Desportes an *Épigramme* of five stanzas, "Some four years ago I made Phillis an offer,"<sup>1</sup> and that from Bertaut, a set of five *stances*, "Whilst wishing Heaven in his ire."<sup>2</sup>

A comparison of the translation of the *Épigramme* of Desportes with its original reveals the fact that the translation is hardly more than a rough paraphrase. The well-bred restraint of the original has given place in the translation to a tone of rollicking bravado. Cotton has missed the spirit of the original almost altogether. Here, as elsewhere, in spite of his liking for the French, he is essentially English: more than once in his translations he seems almost consciously to assert his pride in his nationality by naming bluntly what he perhaps takes to be, let us say, an insincere delicacy in the French. It may be doubted whether "hearty, cheerful Mr. Cotton" could ever have appreciated at its full value the satiric verve and the subtle, seemingly innocent malice of Desportes. There were other qualities in the French lyricist which Cotton could have appreciated. If he had translated more from him, he might, when the occasion rose, have rendered with much effect Desportes' tender sensibility and picturesqueness. But he did not, so far as his publications show, put himself in the way of that opportunity. In only one respect does it seem that this French lyricist may have influenced Cotton's original work. Both are fond of the military figure. Cotton's employment of it, as for instance in the "Ode to Winter," may owe some-

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

thing to Desportes. There had, however, been plenty of precedent for it in English verse, at least after the time of Spenser; though it should be remembered that, as Mr. Sydney Lee has shown, Spenser himself owed much to the influence of the writings of Desportes. With this possible exception of the employment of military imagery, it is hard to find specific traces of the influence of Desportes upon Cotton's own work.

The translation from Bertaut, unlike that from Desportes, is a conscientious translation, and serves as an admirable illustration of the characteristic qualities of this French poet,—namely, his liking for antithesis, paradox, and *pointe*:

“Whilst wishing Heaven in his ire  
 Would punish with some judgment dire  
 This heart to love so obstinate;  
 To say I love her is to lie,  
 Though I do love t' extremity,  
 Since thus to love her is to hate.”

Through five stanzas variations are made upon this paradox, in the end the powers being petitioned to grant the lover,

“Both for my punishment and grace,  
 That, as I do, she love and hate.”

This is a note that has been struck more than once by Cotton himself. An example is this stanza from “Les Amours”:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 380.

"She, that I pursue, still flies me;  
 Her that follows me, I fly;  
 She, that I still court, denies me;  
 Her that courts me, I deny.  
 Thus in one Web we're subtly wove,  
 And yet we mutiny in love."

And for another instance, take the third stanza from Cotton's fine "Ode":<sup>1</sup>

"And must I then be damn't from Bliss  
 For valuing the blessing more,  
 Be wretched made through Happiness,  
 And by once being rich more poor?"

This "Ode" is one which, in conception, is peculiarly Cotton's own; yet, like "Les Amours" and the ode "To Celia," it shows unmistakably, in detail, the influence of Bertaut.

Bertaut and Desportes were evidently not great favorites with Cotton. Their effect upon him seems mainly a superficial effect upon his poetic practice, and yet they had in one fundamental respect a close resemblance to him. Like him, they were eclectic or transitional poets, being in close touch with the passing school and at the same time foreshadowing the abatement of poetic fervor which (under the influence of Malherbe) was soon to follow. Like him, they were members of no school. At any rate, they were the least typical of their school. There would seem, thus, to have been a certain affinity between these two poets and Cotton, and it is possible that

<sup>1</sup> *Poems*, 1689, p. 212.



they may have influenced him in ways not easy to trace.

The succeeding school to the Ronsardists had its leader in Malherbe (1555-1628). He set going a reaction against the Pleiade, or Ronsardists, expressing scorn for their subserviency to the classics, as well as for what seemed to him their distraught enthusiasm. According to Balzac, Malherbe was the first to teach the French that the secret of eloquence lay in the choice of thought and expression, and in the arrangement of words and ideas rather than in the words and ideas themselves. In the interest of simplicity and elegance he instituted reforms in versification, making the line instead of the stanza the structural unit. Malherbe's influence upon Cotton may be said to have been a superficial one, in the sense that it was an influence upon his manner rather than upon his poetic conception.

The one short poem which Cotton selected for translation from Malherbe, suggests at first glance a distinct point of resemblance between the two poets. It is an *épigramme* "Writ in Calista's Prayer-Book."<sup>1</sup> The original is as follows:

"Tant que vous serez sans amour,  
Calista, priez nuit et jour,  
Vous n'aurez point meséricorde;  
Ce n'est pas que Dieu ne soit doux:  
Mais pensez-vous qu'il vous accorde  
Ce qu'on ne peut de vous?"

The translation reads:

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 51.

“Whilst you are deaf to love, you may,  
 Fairest Calista, weep and pray,  
 And yet, alas! no mercy find,  
 Not but God’s mercifull, ’tis true,  
 But can you think he’ll grant to you  
 What you deny to all mankind!”

Here, somewhat as in translating from Desportes, Cotton has evidently tried to heighten the effect of the original by introducing an exclamation in the third line and by giving in general more rhetorical *pointe* to the *épigramme*. Otherwise, except in translating the second line “Fairest Calista, weep and pray,” instead of “Pray night and day,” the translation is literal.

But the important point to notice in comparing the two is the fact that here a note is struck common to the poetry of both Cotton and Malherbe. It sounds clearly in the last three lines of the translation, and in the corresponding lines of the original. It is an appeal of the lover to what purports to be merely good sense and justice, by means of a certain sweet disputativeness of the heart. Both Malherbe and Cotton make frequent use of this appeal; Malherbe in one instance, at least, has shown himself to be fully conscious of his attitude:

“Quant à moi, je dispute avant que je m’engage,  
 Mais quand je l’ai promis, j’aime éternellement.”<sup>1</sup>

And again, in another poem, after a number of stanzas of almost deliberate disparagement of him-

<sup>1</sup> Poesies, p. 136.

self and his affection, Malherbe suddenly queries,

“Mais à quoi tendent ces discours  
O beauté qui de mes amours  
Êtes le port et le naufrage?  
Ce que je dis contre ma foi,  
N'est-ce pas un vrai témoignage  
Que je suis déjà hors de moi?”<sup>1</sup>

This standing aloof from passion to view it sanely, and thus to test its merits in the court of good-sense, is characteristic of Malherbe, even in his most fervid verses, those inspired by “Calista,” the Vicontesse d’ Auchy. The same point of view is taken by Cotton, also, time and again. In these lines from Cotton’s ode “To Chloris”<sup>2</sup> we find an expression of it:

“Though I pretend to wrestle and repine  
Your beauties sweet are in their height,  
And I must still adore.”

So, too, in the following lines from the ode “To Love,”<sup>3</sup> after four stanzas of self-analysis, he makes a confident appeal for justice,

“Raised to this height, I have no more,  
Almighty Love, for to implore  
Of my auspicious Stars, or Thee,  
Than that thou bow her noble mind  
To be as mercifully kind  
As I shall ever faithful be.”

<sup>1</sup> Poesies, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Poems, 1689, Stances Irreguliers, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 44.

And again, at the end of "The Expostulation"<sup>1</sup> the note is struck:

"Whence then can this change proceed?  
Say; or whither does it tend?  
That false heart will one day bleed,  
When it has brought so true a Friend  
To cruel and untimely end."

It might seem from these examples that here we have discovered between Malherbe and Cotton an identity of attitude, and perhaps of conception. Both make a show of resisting love, as if to compel the emotion to prove itself: if it survives that ordeal they press their case as if to do so were almost compulsory by nature,—"like must of necessity respond to like" and love, above all, finds itself helpless to resist its kind. But a closer study of Cotton makes one conclude that though he does indeed take this attitude more than once,—prompted no doubt by Malherbe to its use as a poetic device,—it is not a deep nor a vitally characteristic attitude with him. With Malherbe this mood is the prevailing one, and though at times, in his most personal lyrics, it does not seem to serve his purpose to the best advantage, it does serve most admirably when, vicariously inspired, he gives play to that half-dramatic gift by means of which he produced highly successful plaints for his friends and patrons. Cotton, unlike the French poet, had no aptitude for vicarious inspiration; personal inspiration seems to have been absolutely necessary for his best work. So that, among

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 3.

French lyrists, Racan and Théophile, with their natural egoism, found the deepest response in him.

But, nevertheless, upon Cotton's poetic style the influence of Malherbe seems clearly marked. Malherbe stood for simplicity in poetic expression. But he was not an extremist even in this respect. Rather, in attempting to reach his ideal, he took the narrow path between preciosity on one hand and colloquialism on the other. So far as diction was concerned, his simplicity meant hardly more than current good usage, taken in a wide sense to include the usage common to all classes. His poetic words were to be also good prose words, and the specifically poetic values attached to them, however they may have been acquired, were not to be considered. In a sense this attitude was truly simple and unaffected, though it was not, of course, an elemental simplicity and naturalness such as Wordsworth in advocating simplicity seems sometimes to have had in mind. This simplicity of Malherbe, however, was the simplicity of Cotton. It is especially so in Cotton's best work, as for instance in "The Retirement," and other poems addressed to Isaac Walton, in "The New Year," the "Summer Day Quatrain," and the "Ode to Winter." In these poems the effect is produced by means of the harmonious arrangement of simple elements. This is true in spite of the fact that both Malherbe and Cotton make frequent use of classical personifications. They accepted that convention as simply as they accepted other conventions of current good usage.

Another phase of similarity between Malherbe and Cotton may be mentioned here, though it is hardly more than another aspect of what has just been pointed out. Malherbe had what may be called a keen illative sense; his poems progress step by step toward a goal, and if the direction is not in a straight line, the deviation is explicitly marked. This method of construction gives clearness, or the appearance of clearness, to his compositions. In Cotton, one finds a reflection of this too; though by him it seems to be hardly as seriously employed as by Malherbe. Cotton's egoism, one feels, is frequently restive behind this mask of reasonableness. At such moments, the effect produced is quaint and touching. Beneath the clear-voiced ring of lines rhetorically linked together, one catches that peculiar undertone of wistful eagerness which is one of Cotton's most authentic notes.

To recapitulate, the two aspects of Cotton's verse that may with some degree of certainty be ascribed to the influence of Malherbe are, first, that plain, matter-of-fact simplicity of much of his best poetry; and, secondly, that illative method of arrangement, which, masking decorously the willful pulse of passion, gives at least the appearance of logical necessity to a dilemma of sentiment. The influence of Malherbe, perhaps because it affected mainly the surface of Cotton's poetry, is not difficult to trace in his work. A few instances of it may be found in the following poems: "Elegy,"<sup>1</sup> "The New

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 11.

Year,"<sup>1</sup> the "Joys of Marriage,"<sup>2</sup> "Epistle to John Bradshaw, Esq."<sup>3</sup> and "Ode."<sup>4</sup>

Maynard (1582-1646) was one of Malherbe's chief disciples. Malherbe himself said that Maynard made excellent verses, but had unfortunately applied himself to a *genre* for which he was not fitted: he wished to write *épigrammes*, but lacked the power to succeed because he had not enough *pointe*. Of the *épigrammes* of Maynard, Cotton translated ten. If the large number seems to indicate an affinity between the two poets, it consisted in a desire to make use of a poetic form with which Cotton had no greater success than Maynard. Maynard's gift was not that of the epigrammatist, nor was Cotton's. Both could begin an *épigramme* with promise, but neither was able to finish it with the required pungency. For wit they frequently substituted grossness. Neither had the peculiar intellectual quirk of the epigrammatist. Cotton's best work in this *genre* is illustrated by the "Epigram."<sup>5</sup> It is obviously in the manner of Maynard but it is rather better than any of the translated *épigrammes*, being more spirited in attack, and having more *pointe*. Many of Cotton's amorous lyrics, also, take an epigrammatic turn; for instance, the ode "To Celia"<sup>6</sup> and the "Sonnet."<sup>7</sup>

But, as in the case of Malherbe, the influence of Maynard upon Cotton would seem to have been only

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 126, 129.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

superficial. Cotton's Muse was peculiarly hospitable to any influence that came her way. At the same time that he was, in all probability, experimenting in his verses with the cynicism of Maynard, he was also imitating the delicate flattery, real and affected, of the *Hôtel de Rambouillet*. The influence of this latter coterie of poets has left marked—though as in the case of Malherbe and Maynard, also superficial—traces in Cotton's work.

About 1608, Catherine de Vivonne, or as she was called later Madame de Rambouillet, displeased with the coarseness of the life at the French court, withdrew herself from it, and assembled about her at the *Hôtel de Rambouillet* a famous coterie. For the present purpose it is not necessary to give an extended account of the group of men and women, who, catching her spirit, dedicated themselves to the cultivation of refined amusement and polished conversation. During half a century, however, they exerted a wide influence upon social ideals and manners, and though at length, the absurdity of some of their aspirations,—that, in particular, of Platonic love,—became glaringly apparent, they presented for the most part an example of fair and decorous social life.

Naturally, this ancillary court of Madame de Rambouillet sought to express itself in *vers de société*. Voiture (1598–1648) and Benserade (1612–1691) were the most brilliant of these coterie versifiers. Their function consisted in the composition of witty, impromptu verses, in honor of the polite life of the *Hôtel de Rambouillet*. Their



opportunity was such as could be furnished by any salient trifle,—a novelty of personal adornment, for instance, or a clever *jeu d' esprit*. The object of their art was compliment so delicately shaded that at first glance it failed to catch the eye as compliment, and pleased insensibly. Of such art, prettiness, ingenuity, and above all gayety were the essential graces. Both Voiture and Benserade performed their task successfully: Voiture in particular did so exquisitely well that he is still remembered as the model for this kind of poetical *conceits*.

Cotton translated little from these experts in preciousness,—nothing, in fact, but an *épigramme* of Benserade,<sup>1</sup> and that *épigramme* happens not to be peculiarly characteristic of their work. That he translated nothing at all from Voiture may be accounted for by the fact that the latter's work was not published until 1695. But Voiture's work was finished by 1648, and it is probable that Cotton came in the way of it during his residence in France, in 1655. Though Cotton translated very little from these poets, there is no lack of evidence that he knew of their work, and for a time, was much influenced by it. Among his lyrics there are a number obviously in the manner of the coterie. These are "Her Name,"<sup>2</sup> "Her Hair,"<sup>3</sup> "To Cupid,"<sup>4</sup> "Her Sigh,"<sup>5</sup> "Cœlia's Ague,"<sup>6</sup> and "A Valediction."<sup>7</sup> In general these poems have as their ob-

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1680, p. 636.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 472.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 407.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 418.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 420.

ject the turning of well-bred compliment, and they accomplish their task with a vivacity and grace comparable to that of their models. They show, in particular, the unmistakable influence of Voiture. In "Her Sigh," for one instance, the light grace of the classical allusion (stanza III) is strongly suggestive of Voiture:

"When Thisbe's Pyramus was slain  
This sigh had fetched him back again,  
And such a sigh from Dido's chest  
Wafted the Trojan to her Breast."

In these poems of Cotton, also, the pretty duplicity of Platonic love is affected in a way which is characteristic of Voiture. In "Her Hair" (stanza II) these lines occur;

"Me thinks I'm now all sacred fire,  
And wholly grown  
Devotion:  
Sensual Love's in chains,  
And all my boiling veins  
Are blown with sanctifi'd desire."

Of the same sentiment and treatment, the last four stanzas of "A Valediction" furnish another good example. The Platonic cult had of course been in vogue for a long time in both France and England; but these touches in Cotton may be confidently ascribed to the influence of Voiture, because of their employment as means incidental to the real object and appeal of the poem—that of delicately veiled flattery.

Furthermore, Voiture's method of amplification

by means of antithesis is also found in these verses of Cotton. Those "To Cupid"<sup>1</sup> furnish perhaps the best example. Stanza II may serve as illustration.

"Surrender without more ado,  
I am both King and subject too,  
I will command, but must obey,  
I am the Hunter and the Prey,  
I vanquish, yet am overcome,  
And sentencing, receive my doom."

The mere fact that antithesis has been used is not, of course, the significant thing; but the manner of its employment, for the purpose of light, crisp amplification, suggests at once the coterie.

To turn again to a comparison of general effects, an interesting resemblance exists between Voiture's *Stances* "*Sur sa Maîtresse rencontrée en habit de garçon, sur un soir de Carnaval*,"<sup>2</sup> and Cotton's "*Amoret in Masquerade*."<sup>3</sup> In these poems the theme is identical; the poet feels strangely attracted by a boy who proves to be his mistress in disguise. The treatment is the same in both poems, being ingenious and pretty, and conveying that indefinable vivacity which is the perfection of this sort of verse, rising as it does from a sincere desire to please.

Finally, there is in Cotton's volume another indication of the influence of these coterie poets. Among his original poems are found two *rondeaux* and a *virelai*. The importance of this fact becomes plain when it is remembered that these and other

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 472.

<sup>2</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> Œuvres, p. 102.

artificial forms had been for the most part discarded by the French themselves toward the end of the fifteenth century, and were revived only about 1640, by the coterie.<sup>1</sup>

Voiture wrote some thirty *rondeaux* in the common form; a a b b a, a a b, (refrain), a a b b a, (refrain). Neither of Cotton's *rondeaux* conforms to this rime scheme. The first differs also from those of Voiture in being anything but gallant. The second is in keeping with the spirit of Voiture, and even in respect to technique compares favorably with his.

The presence of these forms among Cotton's lyrics is significant as helping to show how closely he was in touch with French poetic movements. No other of his contemporaries except Patrick Carey,<sup>2</sup> who had lived most of his life in France, made any use of these French forms. After Cotton they were no longer used for strictly poetic purposes by English poets until the comparatively recent work of Austin Dobson, Edmund Gosse, and their imitators.

<sup>1</sup> The *Pleiade*, in setting about the improvement of French verse, had rejected these forms because they felt that the language needed the discipline furnished by the adoption of classical and Italian forms. And later when Malherbe, in turn, sought to withstand this tendency of the *Pleiade*, he did not revert, as might naturally have been expected, to the older native forms, but urged merely the perfecting of the language and forms as they existed. The archaic diction and the loose structure of the mediæval poets was as distasteful to him as the extravagance of the Ronsardists. Thus the *Provençal* forms, as well as the *rondeau*, and other Northern forms, had been discarded by French lyrical poets for more than a century.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Carey: *Trivial Poems and Triolets*, 1651.

So far as it has been dealt with as yet, the influence of the French lyrists on Cotton seems to have been mainly superficial. Here and there in his work we find a poem which, in part or as a whole, suggests the manner of Desportes, of Bertaut, of Malherbe, of Maynard, or of the coterie poets. Now and then, indeed, even a poetic idea seems to have been caught from one or other of them. But in such cases Cotton seems to be only experimenting with an idea that for the moment has caught his fancy. Of the poets so far mentioned, Malherbe's influence seems, all in all, to have been the most important. It was not a vital influence, to be sure, but it was a pervasive one. It accounts for much of the simplicity and directness of Cotton's verse, and for its free, clear movement. But two other poets are now to be mentioned whose influence upon Cotton was preëminently important, because of a real poetic kinship that existed between him and them. These two are Théophile de Viaud and Honorat de Racan.

Théophile de Viaud (1590–1626), like Desportes, Bertaut, and also Racan, was an eclectic. In reading him, says Julleville, one is reminded often of Malherbe, now and then of Rénier, sometimes of Ronsard and of Desportes.<sup>1</sup> He refused to bend his spirit to meet the requirements of either school, and tried, as he himself said, to harmonize in his art “la douceur de Malherbe et l’ardeur de Ronsard.”

<sup>1</sup> *Langue et Littérature Française*, Par M. Petit de Julleville, vol. iv, p. 61.

He was at his best, perhaps, when he "medit de la passion et affecte l' egoisme":

"Car (he says) c'est une fureur de chercher—  
qu'en nous-même  
Quelqu' un que nous aimons et quelqu' un qui  
nous aime.  
Le cœur le mieux donné tient toujours à demi.  
Chacun s'aime un peu mieux toujours que son  
ami."

His poetic theory consisted only in the practice of naturalness and simplicity; "Les plus excellents traits de la poésie sont à bien peindre une naïveté." In respect to form, he went even farther than Malherbe in the direction of simplicity, or perhaps better, of naturalness. Toward the end of his poetic life, he gave up the use of conventional classical mythology altogether, as Malherbe never did, and in general cultivated an artistic independence that could not always be distinguished from an innate dislike of discipline. He bitterly condemns those poets, who

"Grattent tant le françois qu'ils le déchirent tout,  
Blasment tout ce qui n'est facile qu'à leur goust;  
Sont un mois à cognoistre, en tastant la parole,  
Lors que l'accent est rude ou que la rime est molle,  
Veulent persuader que ce qu'ils font est beau  
Et que leur renommée est franche du tombeau,  
Sans autre fondement sinon que tout leur age  
S'est laissé consommer en un petit ouvrage,  
Que leurs vers dureront au monde précieux,  
Parce qu'en les faisant ils sont devenus vieux.  
. . . Mon ame," (he adds) "imaginant, n'a point  
la patience

De bien polir les vers et ranger la science.  
La regle me desplaist, j'ecris confusément:  
Jamais un bon esprit ne fait rien qu'aisément."<sup>1</sup>

These lines express at once the strength and the weakness of Théophile; he had much more poetic power than Malherbe, but he lacked that poet's genius for taking infinite pains. Théophile affected rather the *bel air*, *le ton cavalier*, as a protest against the pedant and the grammarian.<sup>2</sup>

Cotton translated three of Théophile's poems, his beautiful *Stances* "Quand tu me vois baiser tes bras,"<sup>3</sup> a sonnet, "Chere Isis, tes beantez ont troublé la nature,"<sup>4</sup> which Cotton has turned into an "ode," and an *Elegie*, "Depuis ce triste jour qu'un adieu malheureux."<sup>5</sup>

These translations follow their originals closely, and reproduce remarkably well their spirit; though they undergo a distinct change of manner in crossing the channel. The translation of the following lines is unusually literal:

"La rose en rendant son odeur,  
Le soleil donnant son ardeur,  
Diane et le char qui la traine,  
Une Naïade dedans l'eau,  
Et les Graces dans un tableau,  
Font plus de bruiet que ton haleine."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Œuvres Completes de Théophile, Par M. Alleaume, Paris, 1856, "Elegie, a une dame," pp. 218, 219.

<sup>2</sup> Théophile, Fragments d'une Histoire Comique (Œuvres, vol. ii, p. ii).

<sup>3</sup> Théophile, Œuvres, vol. i, p. 209—Cotton's trans. (Poems: 542).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., vol. ii, p. 53—Cotton's trans. (Poems: 573).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., vol. ii, p. 62—Cotton's trans. (Poems: 575).

<sup>6</sup> Théophile, *Stances*, vol. i, 209.

“In breathing her perfume the Rose,  
 In shooting forth his heat the Day,  
 The Chariot, where Diana goes,  
 And Naiads, when in Flouds they play,  
 The silent Graces in a Picture, too,  
 Make more of noise, than thy soft Breathings  
 do.”<sup>1</sup>

In the succeeding lines from the same poem, the difference between the two poets begins to appear. Théophile says simply, in his third stanza,

“Le sommeil, aise de t’avoir,  
 Empesche tes yeux de me voir  
 Et te retient dans son empire  
 Avec si peu de liberté  
 Que ton esprit tout arresté  
 Ni murmure ny respire.”

Cotton substitutes Morpheus for “sleep,” and, with bold strokes of his brush, almost altogether overlays the delicate limning of the original, thus:

“Morpheus, glad of the surprise,  
 In his black Empire thee detains,  
 And hides from seeing me thine eyes  
 With so dull, so heavy chains,  
 That thy soft slumber’d-charmed spirits lye  
 Dumb, without murmurs at his Tyranny.”

For the same note of difference, compare the following, the twenty-first line of Théophile’s *Elegie*,

“Ainsi que le soleil est suivy de la nuit,”

with its corresponding line in the translation,

<sup>1</sup> *Poems*, 1689, p. 544.



“For, as black night pursues the glorious Sun,”  
and this, the sixty-ninth line of the original,

“Tomber d’un precipice et voir mille serpens”  
with Cotton’s paraphrase of it,

“And there a thousand ugly Serpents see,  
Hissing t’ advance their scaly Crests at me.”

In these cases, it would seem that Cotton cared very little for the lightness and ease of the French, and tried deliberately to give his translations a more robust vigor, or else that he made the translations before he came to appreciate fully the real power of the French.

These examples, however, taken by themselves are in danger of giving a wrong impression of the difference between Théophile and Cotton. Whereas, in the case of Malherbe, the resemblance was a matter of form rather than of spirit, in this case it is rather one of spirit than of form. In reading these translations, with their originals in mind, one is struck time and again, in spite of an obvious difference in manner and detail, with the happy success of the reproduction in substance. Substantially, the impression given is true. Where Cotton deviates from his original, it is evidently for the sake of what at the time seemed to him an increase of vigor. Sometimes, in these cases, there is a clear echo of an Elizabethan gusto and grandiloquence quite alien to Théophile. For this reason I should date these translations early; before Cotton came really to

understand Théophile. That he did come to understand him later, and that he tried, in the best sense, to imitate him, I believe the following citations will tend to prove. Compare Théophile's "La Solitude" (*Œuvres*, vol. i, 176) with Cotton's "The Surprise" (Poems: 392); the translation from Théophile (Poems: 542) with Cotton's original poem, "The Visit" (Poems: 395). And as showing in temper the same influence, though I cannot in these instances make specific comparisons with poems of Théophile, take the following: "Day-Break" (Poems: 339); "Ode, Is't come to this, that we must part" (Poems: 212); "To Chloris" (Poems: 439); "Taking Leave of Chloris" (Poems: 440), and "The Tempest" (Poems: 374).<sup>1</sup> Especially convincing seems the comparison of Cotton's "Elegies" with those of Théophile.

Attention should be called, also, in noting the resemblance between them, to the moralizing vein found in both Théophile and Cotton. See Théophile's "Ode" (*Œuvres*, vol. i, 190); "Ode, À Monsieur de Montmorency" (*Œuvres*, vol. i, 161); and "Consolation, À Mademoiselle de L." (*Œuvres*, vol. i, 212); in these the gentle stoicism expressed is strongly suggestive of the spirit of Cotton's poems addressed to Isaac Walton, and of that set of verses "To John Bradshaw, Esq."<sup>2</sup> Here as elsewhere, of course, the same allowance must be

<sup>1</sup> In this last case, however, the conception is rather to be attributed to Desportes, than to Théophile; but the manner resembles Théophile.

<sup>2</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 59.

made for subtle differences of manner. Théophile is keenly delicate both in drawing and coloring; Cotton is comparatively rough and bold. But the spirit of their erotic verses is essentially the same. Both are fervidly sensuous, and yet both have a tendency to abate the effect of their impetuous egoism; bits of conversational detail are slipped in to mitigate the fervor of the verse, as if the man of the world tried thus to moderate an expression of feeling too serious for conventional life. This note is often, in the poetry of both, very touching in its suggestion of humorous deprecation.

In an epistle, *À Monsieur du Farcis*, Théophile in declaring his inability to write love verses by vicarious inspiration or in the abstract as Malherbe had done, explains what his forte is:

“Ces termes esgarez” (he says) “offencent mon  
humeur,  
Et ne viennent qu’au sens d’un novice rimeur  
Qui reclame Phebus; *quant à moy, je l’abjure*  
*Et ne recognois rien pour tout que ma nature.*”

The note of individualism, so often to be found in Cotton in combination with fervor of feeling and picturesqueness of expression, seems attributable in part at least to the encouragement and example of Théophile.

From Racan, the lyrist who had with Théophile,—and even more subtly perhaps than the latter,—a vital influence upon Cotton’s work, Cotton translated but two lyrics. One of these is the erotic ode, “Ungrateful cause of all my harms,”<sup>1</sup> and the

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 618.

other, a "Bacchic Ode, Now that the Day's short and forlorn."<sup>1</sup> The first of these suggests at once a comparison with one of Cotton's original lyrics, that "To Chloris." The following stanzas may serve to illustrate. The first is from Racan's Ode, as translated by Cotton,

"In Bloody Fields where Mars doth make  
With his loud thunder all to shake  
Both Earth, and Heaven to boot;  
Man's power to kill me I despise,  
Since Love, with Arrows from your eyes,  
Had not the pow'r to do 't."<sup>2</sup>

The one that follows is from Cotton's original lyric, "To Chloris,"

"Yet, when I rush into these Arms,  
Where Death and Danger do combine,  
I shall less subject be to harms  
Than to those killing eyes of thine."<sup>3</sup>

The other translation, the "Bacchic Ode," resembles in general such bacchanalian poems of Cotton as the "Chanson à Boire,"<sup>4</sup> "Clepsydra,"<sup>5</sup> and the odes, "Come, let us drink away the time,"<sup>6</sup> and "The Day is set did Earth adorn."<sup>7</sup> These poems, like the "Bacchic Ode" from Racan, are not merely drinking songs. They have—and it is the

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 319.

<sup>2</sup> Racan's Ode, as translated by Cotton.

<sup>3</sup> "To Chloris," an original poem; Poems, 1689, p. 439.

<sup>4</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

most striking thing about them—an undertone of seriousness, at times even of melancholy. They emphasize the vanity of taking too much thought of the morrow, and insist upon the preciousness of the fleeting present. “He ne’er can recover,” says one of Cotton’s songs, “the day that is over”; let him not then neglect the pleasure of good-fellowship, the gracious invitation of

“Plump Autumn’s wealthy overflow.”

It is tender and thoughtful sentiment rather than the love of good-cheer which characterizes these convivial songs. *Bons vivants* both Cotton and Racan no doubt were, but in spite of their love of sensuous pleasure they were at heart unaffectedly pious as well as tender.

In these respects the two poets were most suggestively alike, and in some added respects as well. Both had an abundance of force and poetic gift; both were impatient if not careless workmen. But alike as they are in the elements of poetic feeling, in poetic manner they seem at times almost diametrically opposed. They suggest certain cases of friendship, now and then encountered, in which two persons of totally different manner agree in an essential attitude toward things. Cotton is for the most part vigorous in phrasing,—so vigorous that his effects are sometimes almost brusque; his lines march boldly. Racan, on the other hand, is gentle and restrained, his pervasive appeal being that of the most delicately toned sentiment and emotion. Yet, even with this aspect of Racan in mind, one

may find verses of Cotton which rival those of the French lyrist in delicacy. "Cœlia's Fall,"<sup>1</sup> and the "Epitaph on M. H."<sup>2</sup> are poems in which Cotton shows a fineness of feeling and expression at least equal to that of Racan.

Another point of likeness between these two poets is their attitude toward nature. Both were sincere lovers of nature, though neither was attracted by it as something worth while apart from human feeling. Human emotion in the presence of nature impressed them more than beautiful colors and shapes. In the case of both, however, truth of sentiment, simply and naturally expressed, gives to their slightest touches of description a delightful freshness and charm. An illustration of this attitude may be found in the following (the last three) stanzas of Racan's "The Country Life":

"Crois-moi, retirous-nous hors de la multitude,  
Et vivons désormais loin de la servitude  
De ces palais dorés où tout le monde accourt.  
Sous un chêne élevé les arbrisseaux s'ennuient;  
Et devant le soleil tous les astres s'enfuient,  
De peur d'être obligés de lui faire la cour.

Après qu'on a suivi sans aucune assurance  
Cette vaine faveur qui nous paît d'esperance,  
L'envie, en un moment, tous nos desseins détruit;  
Ce n'est qu'une fumée; il n'est rien de si frêle.  
La plus belle moisson est sujette à la grêle,  
Et souvent elle n'a que des fleurs pour du fruit.  
Agréables deserts, séjour de l'innocence,  
Où, loin des vanités, de la magnificence,

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 519.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 354.

Commence mon repos et finit mon tourment,  
 Vallons, fleuves, rochers, plaisante solitude,  
 Si vous fûtes témoins de mon inquietude,  
 Soyez-le désormais de mon contentement."

With these stanzas from Racan may be compared, in particular, the eighth and tenth divisions of Cotton's ode, *The Retirement*:

## VIII.

"Oh, my beloved Rocks! that rise  
 To awe the Earth, and brave the Skies;  
 From some aspiring Mountain's crown  
     How dearly do I love,  
 Giddy with pleasure, to look down,  
 And from the Vales to view the noble heights above!

## X.

"Lord! would men let me alone,  
 What an over-happy one  
 Should I think myself to be,  
 Might I in this desert place,  
 Which most men by their voice disgrace,  
 Live but undisturbed and free!  
     Here in this despis'd recess  
     Would I manage Winter's cold  
 And the Summer's worst excess,  
 Try to live out to sixty full years old,  
     And all the while  
     Without an envious eye,  
 On any thriving under Fortune's smile,  
 Contented live, and then contented die."

Here, it is to be remarked, Cotton is the more vigorous; Racan the more gentle and restrained. But after all, this difference between the two in point

of execution may be largely a difference of national idiom. Cotton is the English, so to speak, of Racan, and Racan is the French of Cotton.

It can scarcely be doubted, in recapitulating the influence of the French lyrists upon Cotton, that the general clearness and simplicity of his poetry are due in a considerable measure to their combined influence. But in these respects Malherbe's influence was, perhaps, the predominating one, an influence which was, however, pervasive rather than deep. Other superficial tendencies in Cotton may be traced, in part at least, to these French lyrists: his fondness for military imagery to Desportes, for mythological allusion to Malherbe, for *pointe* to Maynard, and for amplification by antithesis to Voiture. But it was in Théophile de Viaud and in Racan that he found vital encouragement. Between him and these two there is real kinship. Like him, they are poets of compromise, assimilating and adapting everything suitable to their purpose. Like him, though careless workmen, they are in feeling and conception genuinely poetic. Théophile's fervor and picturesqueness, and Racan's tender sensibility must, to judge by what seems most distinctive in Cotton's own work, have appealed to him strongly. The poetic point of view in all three is the same. It is that of simple-hearted, almost naïve egoism,—an egoism that, having no misgivings, expresses itself frankly, and yet is tempered by a sincere desire to be found worthy of what is so egoistically sought. It has an insistence at once so natural and tender—at times so wistful—that one easily condones



its selfishness. It is an attitude toward love very different from the cynical attitude of most of Cotton's contemporaries at home, and, whether he derived it from these French lyrists or not, he held it in common with them.

## THE POETRY OF NATURE AND OF MEDITATION

In spite of what Cotton has said about the "cold and blustering climate of the Peak" his beloved Beresford Dale was a bit of Arcadia. Its color and warmth, and its atmosphere of soft holiday-calm must have served as the setting for the "Invitation to Phillis," the theme of which is that of Marlowe's exquisite lyric,

"Come with me and be my love  
And thou shalt all the pleasure prove."

He set himself too great a task in attempting—if he did attempt—to rival Marlowe. But his amplification has a beauty of its own; the variations, though superabundant, have remarkable fluency and grace:

"Thy Summer's bower shall over-look  
The subtil windings of the brook,

From this thy sphear thou shalt behold  
Thy showy Ewes troop o'er the mold  
Who yearly pay my Love a-piece  
A tender Lamb, and silver Fleece.  
And when Sol's Rayes shall all combine  
Thine to out-burn, though not outshine,  
Then, at the foot of some green Hill,

Where crystal Dove runs murm'ring still,  
Will angle for the bright-ey'd Fish  
To make my Love a dainty dish;  
Or, in a cave by Nature made,  
Fly to the covert of the Shade."

The companion piece to this, the "Entertainment to Phillis," is written in the same vein, expressing the same naïve and indiscriminate satisfaction in beauty whether of art or of nature. The note which has been struck with most perfect success by Marlowe in the well-known couplet,

"A belt of straw and ivy-buds,  
With coral clasps and amber studs,"

Cotton here elaborates with the zest of youth:

"Within my Love will find each room  
New furnished from the Silk-worm's loom;  
Vessels of the true antick mold,  
Cups cut in Amber, Myrrh, and gold;  
Quilts blown with roses, Beds with down  
More white than Atlas' aged Crown;  
Carpets where Flowers waxen grow,  
Only thy sweeter steps to strew,  
Such as may emulation bring.  
To the wrought mantle of the Spring.  
There silver lamps shall silent shine,  
Supply'd by Oyls of Jessamine,  
And mists of odours shall arise  
To air thy little Paradise.  
I have such Fruits, too, for thy taste,  
As teeming Autumn never grac't;  
Apples as round as thine own eyes;  
Or, as thy Sister Beauties prize,

Smooth as thy snowy skin, and sleek  
And ruddy as the Morning's cheek;  
Grapes, that the Tyrian purple wear,  
The spritely matrons of the year,  
Such as Lyæus never bare  
About his drowsy brows, so fair,  
So plump, so large, so ripe, so good,  
So full of flavor and of blood.  
There's water in a Grot hard by,  
To quench thee, when with dalliance dry,  
Sweet as the milk of Sand-red Cow,  
Brighter than Cynthia's silver Bow,  
Cold as the Goddess' self e'er was,  
And clearer than thy looking-glass."

These poems obviously suggest the spirit of such lyrists as Barnfield and Breton, and in a less degree that of Herrick; they foreshadow the abundant fancy and the unabashed hedonism of Keats. The poignancy of Keats is lacking, but in these poems of Cotton there is almost if not quite equal sympathy with sensuous joy.

But this idyllic charm was not the only debt that Cotton owed the Elizabethan lyrists. The bracing naturalism of Shakespeare's "Winter" appealed to him with perhaps even greater power. The "Summer-Day Quatrains" present a series of *genre* sketches that in vividness are almost unsurpassed. Let the following stanzas serve for example and comparison; the first from Shakespeare's lyric,

"When icicles hang by the wall  
And Dick the Shepherd blows his nail  
And Tom bears logs into the hall  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,"

and these two from Cotton's "Evening Quatrains,"

"The Cock now to the roost is prest,  
For he must call up all the rest;  
The sow's fast pegg'd within the Sty  
To still her squeaking progeny.

Each one has had his supping mess,  
The cheese is put into the Press,  
The Cans and Bowls clean scalded all  
Rear'd up against the Milk-house Wall."

Again, in this stanza from the "Night Quatrains," there is the same direct and graphic realism:

"The Fire's new rak't and Hearth swept clean  
By Madge the dirty Kichin-quean,  
The Safe is lock't, the Mouse-trap set,  
The Leaven laid, and Bucking wet."

It is interesting to note, whether the fact is significant or not, that a Scotch poet, Alexander Hume (1560-1609), almost a hundred years before, had taken the same theme as that of Cotton's "Summer-day Quatrains" and treated it in the same manner. In "The Day Estivall"<sup>1</sup> Hume wrote:

"The burning beams down from his face  
Sae fervently can beat,  
That man and beast now seek a place  
To save them frae the heat.

The breathless flocks draw to the shade  
And freshure of their fold;

<sup>1</sup> Veitch, *Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, vol. i, p. 332.

The startling nolt as they were mad,  
Run to the rivers cold.

The laborers that timely raise,  
All weary, faint, and weak  
For heat, down to their houses gaes,  
Noon-meat and sleep to take.

The caller wine in cave is sought,  
Men's brotheing beasts to cool;  
The water cold and clear is brought,  
And sallad steeped in ule."

And Cotton follows, in the "Noon Quatrains":

"The Day grows hot, and darts his rays  
From such a sure and killing place,  
That this half-world are fain to fly  
The danger of his burning eye.

His early glories were benign,  
Warm to be felt, bright to be seen,  
And all was comfort, but who can  
Endure him when meridian?

The grazing herds now droop and pant,  
E'en without labour fit to faint,  
And willingly forsook their meat  
To seek out cover from the heat.

The lagging ox is now unbound,  
From larding the new turn'd up ground,  
Whilst Hobbinol, alike o'erlaid,  
Takes his coarse dinner to the shade.

Cellars and grottoes now are best  
To eat and drink in, or to rest,  
And not a soul above is found  
Can find a refuge underground."

Both poets do justice, with vivid realism in detail, to the successive phases of a summer day—the freshness of sunrise, the withering heat of noon, the pause of evening, and the suspension of night, as symbolized by the sky, the earth, and the occupations of town and country. Whether the English poet was directly indebted to his Scotch predecessor is, of course, impossible to say.

These *genre* pictures of Cotton are often framed, so to speak, in the gilt of mythology. To cite one of the best of them:

“Hark! Hark! the watchful Chanticleer  
Tells us the day’s bright harbinger  
Peeps o’er the eastern hills, to awe  
And warn Night’s sovereign to withdraw.

The Morning Curtains now are drawn,  
And now appears the blushing dawn;  
Aurora has her roses shed,  
To strew the way Sol’s steeds must tread.

Xanthus and Æthon harness’d are,  
To roll away the burning Car,  
And, snorting flame, impatient bear  
The dressing of the charioteer.”

The effect of the combination of mythological splendor with intense realism is comparable to that produced by certain contemporary Dutch painters, the so-called “stuff-painters” who bestowed much care on the luster of their silks and satins, as if thereby to invest scenes of peaceful domestic life with pictorial splendor. But to this effect Cotton, in concluding each set of quatrains,

adds a touch of contemplative reflection, and in the blending of all of these elements—mythology, realism and meditation—recalls to mind Carlyle's "Glorious summer twilights when the Sun like a proud Conqueror and Imperial Taskmaster turned his back, with his gold-purple emblazoning, and all his fire body-guard (of Prismatic colours); the tired brick-makers of this clay earth each might steal a little frolic, and those meek stars would not tell of them."

The "Ode to Winter," to judge by its title, might be expected to be a companion-poem to the "Summer-day Quatrains." But the inspiration of the two poems is from quite different sources. In the "Ode to Winter," we have, instead of a series of sketches, charming in themselves, a poem much more direct, and keen of purpose. Winter is represented as a proud conqueror, a mortal enemy, who with his perfectly appointed host sweeps over the sea, attended by storm and wreck,

"To ravish from our fruitful fields  
All that the teeming season yields,"

and who, at last, binds the earth in shining chains of ice. When his force is seen to be irresistible, the poet retreats into a fortress,

"Where all the Roarers of the North  
Can neither Storm nor Starve us forth."

Safely shut in, he defiantly bids,

". . . Old Winter take his course,  
And roar abroad till he be hoarse,



And his Lungs crack with Ruthless Ire,  
It shall but serve to blow our Fire.”

The poem ends with a stanza which gives rise to an interesting question. If the composition is considered as one merely of fancy and sentiment this stanza seems an unhappy excrescence. It reads as follows:

“Or let him [Winter] Scotland take and there  
Confine the plotting Presbyter,  
His Zeal may frieze, whilst we kept warm  
With love and wine, can take no harm.”

This stanza suggests that its explanation as well as that of the entire poem may possibly be found in the state of public affairs about the time it was written. The poem, indeed, bears with remarkable detail interpretation as a political satire. It will be recalled that it was only about mid-winter, 1655-6, that the people of England and Wales became aware that they were, and had been for some time, under a new system of home-government, called *Government by Major Generals*. The Commonwealth, under stress of circumstances, had been forced step by step toward a military despotism. The country was now divided into twelve military districts, each under a major-general, with a force supported by a tax of ten per cent. on royalist estates. Masson, in his *Life of Milton*, says: “What with the vigilance of the major-generals in their districts, what with edicts of the Protector and the Council for the direction of the major-generals, the public order now kept over all England and Wales was wonderfully strict. At

no time since the beginning of the Commonwealth had there been so much of that general decorum of external behavior which Cromwell liked to see. Cock-fights, dancing at fairs, and other such amusements, were under ban.”<sup>1</sup> Then, the Protector began concerning himself with “the plotting Presbyterian.” Royalists, such as Cotton, were now coming to feel that their cause had only to withstand a siege until the real spirit of the nation should reassert itself. The royalist poet, therefore, might well sing as follows, in a spirit far from that of stoical resignation,—

“Then let the chill Sirocco blow,  
And gird us round with hills of snow;  
Or else go whistle to the shore,  
And make the hollow mountains roar,

Whilst we together jovial sit  
Careless, and crown’d with mirth and wit;  
Where, though bleak winds confine us home,  
Our fancies round the world shall roam.

We’ll drink the wanting into wealth,  
And those that languish into health,  
The afflicted into joy, th’ oppress  
Into security and rest.

The worthy in disgrace shall find  
Favor return again more kind,  
And in restraint who stifled lie  
Shall taste the air of liberty.”

The poem when considered as symbolical of the political condition becomes at once, as a whole, more

<sup>1</sup> Masson, *Life of Milton*, vol. v, p. 51.

significant, and more artistic. Wordsworth, it will be recalled, found this ode merely a highly successful employment of fancy in the treatment of nature and of sentiment. But evidently, from what he said of it, the value of the composition as a whole did not appeal to him strongly. He probably had difficulty, as Mr. A. H. Bullen did also, with the concluding stanza cited above.

Moreover, difficulty has been felt with the word "Vanished" in the following couplet from stanza xxv. The edition of 1689 reads,

"Vanished the Countrys of the Sun  
The fugitive is hither run."

The poet is here speaking of the approach of winter from over seas. The word may, it is true, be only a misprint for "banished," but, assuming that it is not, may the poet not mean to suggest involuntary retreat by force of natural law? If so, he may be supposed to wish to suggest to the reader that the protectorate would ultimately vanish before the returning sun of royalty. To conceive of winter as coming from the south is at best awkward, unless one supposes a symbolical intention in the poem. It may be recalled that during 1655-6 there was much successful military and naval activity in the "Countries of the Sun." In April, 1655, Blake chastised the deys of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli; and in May, Penn and Venables were sent to make reprisals in the Spanish West Indies. Thus, the disturbing conception of winter as approaching from the south, and moving toward Scotland, seems explained by the

political situation—the succession of events being, first, the successful operations abroad in the south during the summer months of 1655, secondly, the realization by the English in mid-winter of the trend of affairs at home, and finally the preparations that were making in regard to the spiritual needs of Scotland. However, the use of “fugitive” in the second line of the above quotation may give some additional difficulty. But perhaps it means, in accord with the above suggestion, that the conqueror is already a fugitive from the countries of the sun, and will be a fugitive from England, too, when, in season, the sun of royalty returns.

On purely poetical grounds, however, this fine “Ode to Winter” may claim appreciation. As Wordsworth has said, the rapidity of detail and the profusion of fanciful comparisons “indicate on the part of the poet extreme activity of intellect and a corresponding hurry of delightful feeling.” The following stanzas will illustrate the truth of this judgment and show how vividly the scenes of the poem have been realized. Winter approaches over the sea:

## IX.

“See, where a Liquid Mountain rides,  
Made up of innumerable Tides,  
And tumbles headlong to the strand,  
As if the Sea would come to Land.

## X.

A Sail, a Sail I plainly spy,  
Between the Ocean and the Sky,

An Argosy, a tall-built ship,  
With all her Pregnant Sails a-trip.

## XI.

Nearer and nearer she makes way,  
With Canvas Wings into the Bay;  
And now upon the Deck appears  
A crowd of busy mariners.

## XV.

Nearer she comes, and still doth sweep  
The Azure Surface of the deep,  
And now at last the Waves have thrown  
Their Rider on our ALBION.

## XVI.

Under the Black cliffs' spumy base  
The sea-sick hulk her freight displays,  
And as she walloweth on the Sand,  
Vomits her burthen to the Land.

## XVIII.

With Heads erect, and plying oar,  
The ship-wreck'd mates make to the Shoar;  
And dreadless of their danger, climb  
The floating Mountains of the brine."

How graphic that last stanza is! One would hardly expect from an inlander such specific treatment of the sea in storm. Cotton has, however, another picture of storm at sea worthy of a place beside this one; it is entitled "The Storm."<sup>1</sup> The following lines describe the tempest at its height:

<sup>1</sup> Poems, 1689, p. 199.

"Wave rode on wave, and every wave a sea.  
Of our small bark, gusts rush'd the trembling sides—  
Against vast billows that contain'd whole tides,  
Which in disdainful fury beat her back  
With such a force as made her stout sides crack,—  
'Gainst others that in crowds came rolling in,  
As if they meant their liquid walls between  
T' engage the wretched hulk and crush her flat,  
And make her squeeze to death her dying freight.  
Sometimes she on a mountain's ridge would ride,  
And from that height her gliding keel then glide  
Into a Gulf yawning, and deep as Hell,  
Whilst we were swooning all the while we fell." <sup>1</sup>

Cotton must have been one of the first among English poets to find poetic satisfaction in these titanic disturbances of nature. The appeal of the sublime, however, can hardly be said to have been what affected him. He does not identify himself in spirit with an overwhelming force in nature and achieve victory over it by virtue of obedient acceptance. Shelley frequently shows such transcendent humility and strength of soul. But for Cotton, mankind belongs to one order; nature to another, and a distinct, order of being. He represents a war of elements; man is an onlooker, and may be a passive sufferer. There are, indeed, in his descriptions occasional touches of what has been called the "pathetic fallacy"; but they are incidental to the main effect and without serious poetical intention. Cotton is too naïve a realist to identify the spirit of man with the physical forces of nature. He merely describes what his eyes see, suggests the attendant

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Donne, *The Storm*, *Muses' Library*, vol. ii, p. 1.

emotions of the observer, and adds the meditative accompaniment which a lively fancy supplies him. But it is noteworthy, none the less, that he is among the first of English poets to triumph over the terror of storm at sea, and over the benumbing cold of winter by simple strength of heart and unsubduable liveliness of fancy. It was this manly virtue, no doubt, which caused Charles Lamb to call him the "hearty, cheerful Mr. Cotton."

From this aspect of the poet—characterized, also, by Lamb, as his "rough magnanimity," we pass to consideration of his meditative poetry. It perhaps derives in part from the "bold and insolent vein" of such Elizabethan meditative poems as a "Farewell to the Vanities of the World" which has been variously attributed to Dr. Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, and Sir Walter Raleigh:

"I would be great, but that the sun doth still  
Level his rays against the rising hill;  
I would be high, but see the proudest oak  
Most subject to the rending thunder-stroke;  
I would be rich, but see men, too unkind,  
Dig in the bowels of the richest mind;  
I would be wise, but that I often see  
The fox suspected whilst the ass goes free;  
I would be fair, but see the fair and proud,  
Like the bright sun, oft setting in a cloud;  
I would be poor, but know the humble grass  
Still trampled on by each unworthy ass:  
Rich, hated; wise, suspected; scorned, if poor,  
Great, feared; fair, tempted; high, still envied more;  
I have wished all, but now I wish for neither;  
Great, high, rich, wise, nor fair, poor I'll be rather."

With these lines may be compared the following stanzas of Cotton's "Contentation." The two passages are rather closely parallel, both in topic and in point-of-view, though they express an obvious difference of temper :

"Is it true happiness to be  
By undiscerning Fortune plac't,  
In the most eminent degree  
Where few arrive, and none stand fast?

Titles and wealth are Fortune's Tayle,  
Wherewith the Vain themselves ensnare!  
The great are proud of borrowed spoils  
The Miser's plenty breeds his care.

The one supinely yawns at rest,  
Th' other eternally doth toyle,  
Each of them equally a beast,  
A pampered Horse, or lab'ring Mowl.

Excess of ill-got, ill-kept pelf  
Doth only Death and Danger breed,  
Whilst one rich Worlding starves himself  
With what would thousands others feed.

Nor is he happier than these  
Who in a moderate estate,  
Where he might safely live at ease,  
Has lusts that are immoderate.

For he, by these desires misled,  
Quits his own vine's securing shade  
T' expose his naked, empty head  
To all the Storms Man's peace invade."

The parallel might be followed out at greater length. It is not the likeness, however, but the dif-



ference between the two poems, considered as wholes, which is important for the present purpose. The final mood of the "Farewell" is expressed as follows:

"Then here I'll sit and sigh my hot love's folly,  
And learn to affect an holy melancholy;  
And if contentment be a stranger then,  
I'll ne'er look for it but in heaven, again."

But Cotton could not "affect an holy melancholy"; the world's disease was as plainly evident to him as to the other, but he saw clearly, also, that,

"There are no ills but what we make,  
By giving Shapes and names to things;  
Which is the dangerous mistake  
That causes all our Sufferings.

We call that sickness, which is health;  
That persecution, which is Grace;  
That poverty, which is true Wealth,  
And that Dishonour, which is praise.

Providence watches over all,  
And that with an impartial eye,  
And if to misery we fall  
'Tis through our own infirmity."

"Unaffectedly pious" is one of the phrases which Mr. A. H. Bullen has applied to Cotton, and perhaps a truer one could not be found for this aspect of his personality. Clear recognition of the hard facts of life, and cheerful determination to withstand them, combine in these poems of meditation to produce that "gravely noble mood" which, as Lowell

says, "shows a knowledge of what goodness is that no bad man could have acquired." It is not a little significant to find this cavalier poet and his great Puritan contemporary in substantial agreement upon an important point. Cotton declares that man happy,

"Who from the busie World retires  
To be more useful to it still  
And to no greater good aspires,  
But only the eschewing ill,"

and Milton with a distinction of phrase that is only his, but with no greater sincerity, expresses the same thing:

. . . . "God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state  
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed,  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait."

In most of Cotton's poetry, the two phases of his work just discussed—namely, his realistic description of nature and his meditation on the meaning of life—are kept apart, or if found in combination they appear successively. The effect of the latter method is that of somewhat disparate moods linked together by rather a loose bond of contiguity. A fundamental law of association does bind them together, but as a matter of artistic execution the composition leaves something to be desired. This criticism is true of both the "Ode to Winter" and the "Summer-day Quatrains." But there is one poem

of which it cannot be said. This is "The Retirement," the poem with which Walton chose to adorn his book. In it Cotton has made harmonious the varied emotions arising from his contemplation of nature and of life. Here he seems to be giving expression to the full compass of his feeling: to the pleasure he took in cleanly household offices, in the freshness of green fields, and in the happiness of days passed by the side of his "beloved Nymph! Fair Dove, Princess of Rivers"; but fused with these sensuous pleasures is the deeper satisfaction he sometimes found in meditation, when, at moments, he rose to almost Wordsworthian clairvoyance and felt the presence of a power in life and nature "to chasten and subdue." At such a time he sings:

"Farewell, thou busy World, and may  
    We never meet again;  
Here I can eat, and sleep and pray,  
And do more good in one short day  
Than he who his whole age outwears  
Upon thy most conspicuous theatres,  
Where nought but vice and vanity do reign.

Good God! how sweet are all things here!  
How beautiful the fields appear!  
How cleanly do we feed and lie!  
Lord! what good hours do we keep!  
    How quietly we sleep!  
What peace! what unanimity!  
How innocent from the lewd fashion  
Is all our business, all our conversation!

Oh, how happy here's our leisure!  
Oh, how innocent our pleasure!

Oh, ye valleys, oh, ye mountains,  
Oh, ye groves and crystal fountains,  
How I love at liberty  
By turn to come and visit ye!

O, Solitude, the soul's best friend,  
That Man acquainted with himself dost make,  
And all his Maker's wonders to intend;  
With thee I here converse at will,  
And would be glad to do so still;  
For it is thou alone that keep'st the soul awake."

It is by this poem, representing him at his best, that we choose to remember Cotton, agreeing with Walton that it cannot fail to make any "reader that is blest with a generous soul" love him the better. The clean vigor and firm simplicity of the lines ensure their own appreciation.



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